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1918

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THE TRAGEDY OF ETARRE

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THE
TRAGEDY OF ETARRE
A POEM

BY

RHYS CARPENTER

New York
STURGIS & WALTON
COMPANY
1912

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CHARACTERS OF THE POEM

PELLEAS

GAWAINE, *knight of the Table Round*

FERGUS, *attendant on* PELLEAS

ETARRE

AILEEN, *maid to* ETARRE

AVRAN, BALARIN, MARIS } *knights of* ETARRE

The scene is laid in the COUNTRY OF ETARRE

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THE TRAGEDY OF ETARRE

PROLOGUE

SCENE: The curtain rises upon shifting fog-clouds which drive across the stage in ceaseless unrest. GAWAINE *is half visible, struggling against the grey drift.*

GAWAINE

Is this the dawn whose fingers strive so weak
To pluck away the clinging shroud of night,
Or is this some unlightened, sullen land
Fallen between the darkness and the day?
Back from me, shrouded phantoms, misty sprites!
This is no time to whirl your shadow-dance:
Seek out the flooded marshes of the North
If ye would revel; seek the sunless heights
And laugh along their chasms and dark ravines,
Or frown and lower on plain of gloomy lakes,
Or battle with the giants of the hills.
[*He unsheathes his sword.*]
Since ye have shape and substance, fear this blade.
Shifting and mocking though ye vex mine eyes,
Yet are ye more than breath of mindless air,
For here I see your bodies' countenance
That leers against me, stupid mouth ajar,

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And there I see your clutching hands which stretch
With boneless fingers, snatching at the wind.
[*He strikes.*]
Lo, how I cleft thee, shuddering breast and waist
From formless nether-limbs! Thy silly strength
Is thistle-down that's harried by the storm,
Or rain-drop's airy bubble threatening
With tiny voice the clarion-mouthèd sea.
Give way, weak phantom-thoughts of impotence,
Less real than clouded dreams that fall and break
In splintered crystals of awakening.
Grey-blooded, mirthless things that toss and fret,
I drive you back before me, void and vain.
[*He disappears in the fog, cleaving with his sword the clouds which press in on every side. From the unseen background are heard three voices singing.*]

SONG

Children of the misty plain,
Creatures wrought of cloud and rain,
Shadowed phantoms of the brain
Of the dreaming earth,
Fade and vanish! in the sun
All your magic is undone,
All your charmèd webs unspun,
Tangles little worth,
Tattered shreds and wisps of grey
By the breezes swept away,
Smitten by the swords of day.
[*During the song the fog has begun to clear.*]
Fade and vanish, take you hence,
Loose your revel, break your spell,

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Crush the heaven's lightless shell;
Hidden in the magic well,
  Held enfettered by our thrall,
Move no wing and stir no sense,
  Bide imprisoned till we call.
[*The fog has entirely cleared.*]

SCENE: A woodland pool, about which stand three maidens, the first of whom is young, the second in the mid of life, the third old, with grey-streaked hair. The trees show autumn leafage. Early morning.

GAWAINE

What sprites are ye that weave a riddled song
Whereby the very forces of the sky
Are held enmeshed in sure obedience?

THE YOUNGEST

Draw near and hearken to our speech,
  For we have wonders on our lips
    And work strange magic with our tongue.

THE SECOND

On sable reef and golden beach
  By will of us sea-things and ships
    In wrack of wind and wave are flung.

THE ELDEST

The fingers of our fortune reach
  From moon to sun and work eclipse
    Whereby dead stars are fashioned young.

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GAWAINE

What wild black speech is this of sun and star,
And what have ye to do with ruined ships?
Are ye the devil's handmaids working grief
Against the sunlit ways of God?

THE ELDEST

We guard:
Ours is a sacred heritage.

THE SECOND

We wait:
Ours is a dark fulfilment.

THE YOUNGEST

We attain:
For we are one with all that moves and is.

GAWAINE

What ye attain I know not, why ye wait
Is hidden till the waiting hour be done,
And what ye guard I see not, yet am fain
To snatch this knowledge from your flying speech
As feather stricken from a fleeing bird.
[*He approaches the three.*]

THE SECOND

The plume that flutters down the tired wind
Is not more idly grasped, nor with less toil
Attained, than is the secret of our word.

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GAWAINE

Is this a spring wherein fair water lies,
Or but illusion's round, some silver gleam
Caught up and pent within the hoop of night,
A mirror wrought of nothing? Nay, but here
Is water welcome to the thirsty mouth!
I pray you by all holy thoughts and names
Give me to drink! Three days of wandering
Have parched my lips and snapped my strength
in twain.

THE YOUNGEST

The well of strange adventure: whoso drinks
Shall fill the changing pages of his deeds
With words of written wonder.

GAWAINE

And the king
Has nought of higher praise to give his knights
Than this: "They sought adventure and attained."
Give me to drink. Alone and without steed,
Wearied with hunger, stricken with fatigue,
I take upon me danger, toil, and strife,
And drink adventure with an eager mouth;
For I am Gawaine, and of Arthur's court!

THE ELDEST

Before that hour when over stony ways
Thy steed was broken, never in the lists
To run against the wind with nostrils wide
Or stand again the shock of breaking spears,

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Before, alone in wood and tangled glade,
Thy feet strove sadly, seeking hermitage,
We knew of Gawaine, dreaming he would come
And beg a draught to quench his bitter thirst.

GAWAINE

What tale is this? Ye knew that I should come?

THE ELDEST

Yea, 'twas our knowledge that this thing should be.

GAWAINE

Beneath gold raiment lurks deceptive heart
And too-great knowledge is a mask for ill.
I fear you that are fair of face, and wise
Beyond all proper wisdom of mankind.
God and the devil's workers are alone
In such foreknowledge.

THE ELDEST

Find no fear of us.
This was a dream: we are beset with dreams.
What faults of ours if they be always true?
We cannot guide our dreams, they are of God.

THE SECOND

We are the warders of a deathless source.
Draw near and drink, and have no further fear.

THE YOUNGEST

We give, yet give not save for gift's return.

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GAWAINE

What will ye of me?

THE SECOND

That which all must give,
Judgement between us of his true desire.

GAWAINE

The shrouds of clinging words are yet undrawn,
And deep enfolded lies the inner wish:
I know not what ye say, nor what ye will.

THE YOUNGEST

No colours of strange magic hide our speech.
The well of strange adventure: whoso drinks
Shall choose between us whom his true desire
Would make companion in the day of deeds.

GAWAINE

Is this the price wherewith a draught is paid?
Small price and quickly given. Yet to choose
Vexes the spirit with a running doubt
That will not rest.

THE YOUNGEST

Nay, drink thy draught,
And when the clamour of the hounds of thirst
Has ceased above its quarry, and thy lips
Are drinking in their long-sought sustenance,
Perchance thy spirit's fire shall rise again

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Until the lamp of judgement shall be light
Within thy mind, to cast its faultless shine
Upon our waiting and release thy doubt.

THE SECOND

Loosen thy helm and make of it thy bowl,
Thy silver goblet dipping crystal wine.

GAWAINE

The subtle threads of water twist and spin
And will not be contained within a helm.

THE SECOND

Nay, make thy trial.

GAWAINE

If there be magic here,
Perchance the helm will hold the dwindling weight;
Else is it vain. Yet let my hands essay
What soul and body thirst for; and ye streams
Of shadowed water, lend your kindly aid.
[*He looses his helmet and dips it into the well until it is filled to the brim. He raises it to his lips, and, stooping above it, drinks long.*]
Through all the barren chambers of my soul
There went the sound of music and a voice
That woke the silence with a song of life;
And my own spirit sang. Through open doors
Came breath of springtime, earth's awakening,
The resurrection from the graves of sleep.

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THE SECOND

Look down, look down: the water at thy feet
Is troubled with the coming of a dream.

[*Gawaine bends over the well and stares into its depths.*]

GAWAINE

What world of changing pageants here is hid?
Across the mirrored passage of the well
Move bright processions, glittering array
Of bannered knights and charging battle-fields.
They shift like oil on silent rivers borne
And blend quick colours caught from rainbow heights
With gold and silver pride of broidered silks
Precious beyond all treasured count of wealth.

[*He remains, staring spellbound.*]

The armies pass, and now again the sky
Lies here reflected, and the shaded trees
Bring silence with their canopy of green.
There sped a swallow like a gleam of grey,
And here the wind went laughing through the leaves.
The magic show has passed.

THE YOUNGEST

It will renew.
Some fuller vision draws across the depths.

THE ELDEST

What seest thou, O Gawaine? for mine eyes
Are not as are my sister's, keen to mark

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From farthest bounds the uttermost approach,
And in quick vision versed; yet mine retain
Their memories, unfaded for all time.

GAWAINE

An armoured knight in shameful wise is borne
Bound to the belly of a drooping steed;
Three sorry knaves of little stature drag
Th' unwilling bridle. Now the dream is passed.
What sight was this? what riddle of a world
Where men are pictures on the water's shield,
And things go by without our minds' control
Like scattered dreams when body's maladies
Assail the brain and make of it their toy?

THE YOUNGEST

This is thy future: time's processional
Moves ever through the water's mirrored depth,
And he who drinks may gain a broken glimpse
Within the endless change of shape and form
Wherewith the false, illusive world of sense
Doth clothe itself in unreality.

GAWAINE

Am I that knight, in wretched manner bound?
Shall others drag me at their bridle's will?
Would I were slain in battle, ere such fate
Had darkened all the splendour of my deeds
And over all the glory of great wars
And broken fields of battle cast a pall.

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THE YOUNGEST

My knight he is and loyally he serves.
But let thine eyes and not thy lips demand
Response: lean forth above the crystal flood
And with keen search from visioned future pluck
A present knowledge; in those depths there lie
The figures, shapes, and fashions of all things.
Call forth again its magic pageantry,
And seek thy answer there.

GAWAINE

The depths are stirred,
Light leaps from shadow, figures move and sway
And gather into outline fraught with life. . . .
Unbound he lies, the horse with feet unmoved
Crops short the herbage, triple caitiff knights
Have laid their hands beneath him; now they toil
Across the gorse; his helpless body hangs
With legs and arms that strike against the ground
In mimic eagerness and mock embrace.
And here they move beyond the mirror's rim,
And lo, myself, approaching on the hill! . . .
Dark! . . . dark! . . . more quick than sun
before the storm,
Or moon cloud-ridden, sped the light away.
This water, gleaming with the shapes of men,
Is now but water —

THE SECOND

And therewith fulfils
Thy thirst, and calls upon thee for thy word,
That pledged reward, that choice between our lives.

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GAWAINE

How ran your saying? "Whoso drinks
Shall choose among us her whom true desire
Would make companion in the day of deeds."
Fair are ye all: here lies no price to pay,
But some reward, heav'n-sent to quench desire.
Fair are ye all, and therein lurks the doubt:
I choose the one, and straight the other two
Neglected rankle, till a gaping wound
Across my memory cries out regret,
And lo, I know not whom my choice approves.
Yet often, when our brains are still at fault,
Still measuring confusion, weighing doubts,
There wakens in our heart a sudden fire
To guide the will and light the darkened thought.
I pray you, therefore, be compassionate
And find no evil in my words; their fault,
If fault they hold, set not against my charge,
But lay their burden at the doors of Them
Who fashioned men and gave them their desires.

THE ELDEST

To him that cries my name, I bring a gift
Of wisdom greater than the strength of kings.
Mine eyes have seen, through many a changing
year,
The circles of men's life revolve, return,
Through birth and childhood unto age and death.
My lips can tell thee tales and mysteries
Of olden days when dragons held the earth
And creatures of the slime were on the sea,

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When men did battle in fierce, brutish wise
And lived in hollow caverns of the hills.

GAWAINE

The past I love not: 'tis a murdered life,
A corpse wherein the worms of memory cling.
I like not tales, they haunt the present deed
And make the sword-edge tremble with their dreams,
The faltering spear-shaft snap within our hands.

THE YOUNGEST

But I am one who never felt the past
Blow like the bitter wind from winter seas.
For me the world is yet a dream unheard,
A flower whose cup has never held the sun.
Turn unto me and love me; thou and I
Shall guide anew the world, restore the right,
And make of men a goodlier, nobler race.

GAWAINE

There is nought certain in this world of change
Save what our hands can grasp, our eyes behold;
All else is mockery of chance and time,
A golden bauble, a deceptive lure,
A sunlit rainbow seen across the clouds, —
Draw nearer, there is nothing: mist and rain.
And thou, fair maid upon the threshold caught
With eager feet half ventured, half afraid,
Thy promise is not yet fulfilment grown,
Thine eyes are mirrors of a future world,

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Foreboders of enchantment, giving view
On womanhood and sweet matured delights,
Still hidden, now, in virginal reserve.
[*He turns towards the* SECOND MAIDEN.]
But thou whose gaze is neither sad nor gay,
Not sad for years behind thee taken flight,
Nor gay with hope of pleasant days unseen,
But full with knowledge of a present grace,
Demanding not from future or from past,
Secure within the fastness of thy ways,
Thou art to me a token and a sign
Of perfect womanhood's unyielding charm,
For matchless adoration set apart.
I choose thee for the mistress whom my spear
Shall champion against the warring earth;
My sword shall bear thy name through cloven steel
Of foeman's helm and reeling battle-shield;
And like a beacon shalt thou blaze and burn
Above the lists, through cries of fallen men,
To light me into battle, till I grasp,
With victor's hand, th' unsteady plume of fame.

THE SECOND

The choice is made, the choosing spirit bound;
The reed is cut, the spoken word is writ;
Closed lies the book; already, many hands
Are fashioning the unrelenting seal.
The hour is here wherein thou shalt depart.
In form invisible I come to guide
Thy shifting purpose and uncertain will.
Go forth and seek fulfilment from thy choice:
Beyond this wood there lies the waiting world

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And many deeds therein, to do or spurn.
Across the shifting picture of thy fate
Lie sun and shadow of incessant change
And nought of steadfast purpose under all
Save me, in guise unseen, to lead thy hand
From fortune into favour, love, and strife.
Farewell, and fare as best such spirits may
That choose my counsel; theirs is but a life
That mocks its own attainment, wrought in vain.
[*She bends over the well and speaks in incantation.*]

Veil the light:
Hide the day!
Shadow and silence!
Dreamless sleep!
Spirits hidden in the well,
Bound beneath a magic spell,
Stirring neither limb nor sense
In an idle impotence,
Rise against the glaring day,
Spreading sable shrouds and dun,
Cover earth and sky with grey;
Cast your veils against the sun!

[*As she speaks, the light gradually wanes. From the well a fine mist begins to rise.*]

GAWAINE

By sorcery accursed I stand agape
Nor stretch a thwarting hand to break the spell.
Were I a cliff, a thousand ages old,
Or gnarlèd pine deep-rooted in the rock,
I could not stand more idly, nor endure

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More helpless in the surging front of ill.

[*The mist grows ever heavier, until a dense fog, rising from the well, has covered the entire stage.*]

THE THREE MAIDENS [*singing*]

Damp and mist and heavy vapour,
Shrouded fog and dripping cold,
Quench the sunlight's fallen taper,
Hide away the flame of gold.
Out of pond and becken cool,
Out of well and fountain head,
Out of tree-enshadowed pool
Where the autumn leaves lie dead,
Where no deer with frightened feet
Ever leapt in terror fleet,
Ont of marshy river bed
Where no forest creature drank,
Out of swamp and fen arisen,
Break your bonds and loose your prison,
Water vapours, grey and dank!

[*The fog has completely hidden everything. The singing voices have drifted ever further and further away, until at last the song dies in the distance. A long silence follows. For several minutes the stage remains grey and void. At last the fog begins to clear.*]

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ACT ONE

SCENE: A wild upland open to the sky. Hill-slopes with scattered firs. The ground is covered with gorse-bushes, knee-high, in golden bloom. The last shreds of fog drift off over the moors to the left and vanish, revealing far-away the gleaming towers of the Castle of ETARRE. *Full morning.* AVRAN, BALARIN, *and* MARIS *stand above the helpless body of* PELLEAS.

AVRAN

Enough of drudge and drag: here let him lie.
The pricking gorse has played an eager bride
And clapped him close in her unwelcome arms.

BALARIN

A weary work fulfilling punishment!
Too often in the scourger's thankless toil
The swinging lash flies back, and with shrewd blow
Assails th' inflicting hand: so is't with us,
Who strain against yon living weight of mail
With bloodless fingers, and with stumbling feet
Through country-side accurst scarce feel our way;
Small glory have we got us therewithal.
This is our fame: to counter with a knight

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Who will not lift his spear against our shields,
A mad-cap creature in whose brain there sits
The bird of folly. Truth, a mighty task.

AVRAN

And here, within the growing heat of morn,
We come like serfs in secret burial,
Dragging a living corpse beneath the sky.
Enough, enough! this is no food for knights;
Our very horses would revolt the taste
And eye their masters with a keen disdain.

MARIS

There is a feast which no knight may refuse
If he be bid to table; all that owe
Allegiance to an overlord must eat
The meat of service, drink the willing wine
Of fealty, whereby true knighthood lives.
You know from whom you draw your honour's strength;
She laid upon us bond of her commands
And bade us from the belly of his steed
Unbind this knight and over briar and thorn
Drag out his body till the breath be faint:
So should his courage vanish like a dream,
And that mad frequency of his desire
Be staid to abstinence. Up! drag him on.

AVRAN

Then snare the sun and strangle out its heat.
Go, draw cool shadows out of distant trees
And wake the winds that sleep upon the hills.

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BALARIN

Call back our bodies' breath that's taken flight
At sight of labour, like a bonded wretch.

MARIS

Then let him lie, and heaven rest his soul.

BALARIN

The mighty Pelleas, the rumoured knight
Well proven in the midmost toil of war,
How fares he now, the hero of the lance,
The champion such as men have never seen?

AVRAN

In curious wise beneath the open sun
He dreams of battle, while the springing gorse
Grows up unheard around his silent helm.

BALARIN

But when his bruisèd limbs have found the balm
Of first recovery, he'll rise and seek
To draw the shattered ships of his emprise
To greater battles over windier deeps.

AVRAN

'Twere well to slay him here and quench his soul.
Else will the spirit that indwells his breast
Grow wings once more and fly above our heads
Like loosened hawk against the fleeing hare.

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MARIS

We may not slay him, tho' 'twere mercy's hand
Which dealt that stroke.

AVRAN

Then will he, like a midge,
In vast persistence make our lives a curse
Of tiny wounds and quick annoyances.

MARIS

'Twill prove him small avail to prick and sting:
The midge, if he return too often, learns
That wings so small can yet be clipped and crushed
And tiny body caught and buffeted.

AVRAN

'Twere well to hold it longer to its cage;
Yet here it has its freedom and the world
Wherein to fly abroad, and lo, it lies
Ungrateful, without sign of thanks or praise.
Fly warrior, we salute thee! Noisy gnat,
Midge of the marshes, fare thee well!

BALARIN

All hail,
Chit-sparrow; sit i' the bush and braggart sing;
O valiant bird! O wren with eagle's soul!
An owl that flies in daytime without eyes.
[BALARIN *and* AVRAN *depart across the hill.* MARIS *follows, but hesitates and turns back.*]

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MARIS [*standing above the body of* PELLEAS]

Too many times, far, far too many times
In this same outcome of the selfsame deed
Have we prevailed above you, dragged you off,
Railed over you and spoken out our curse
Of bitterness against your foolish ways
And ears forever thirsting for abuse.
Too many times our lips have brewed this draught
And mixed the gall of laughter with farewell,
A honeyed mead in truth, a stirrup cup
To speed you in your folly. Change your ways!
But if you fall once more within our hands,
Expect no better fare from us, nor yet
From her that sent us, whom your seeking eyes
Shall never look upon again.

[PELLEAS *moves slightly.*]

PELLEAS

Etarre!

MARIS

Yes, 'tis Etarre! the one sweet word forlorn
That lies upon your lips like magic seal,
Like stroke of sorcery and mystic spell
Awak'ning fever in your blood and brain
That iron may not chill, nor dungeon tame!

[*He goes off. Silence.*]

PELLEAS [*moaning*]

O world! O disillusion!

[*In a sudden passionate outburst*]

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Black despair,
Come, cover me with all the shrouds of night!
[*Silence.* FERGUS, *attendant on* PELLEAS, *comes over the hill to the right.*]

FERGUS

I marked them how they stood upon this hill
In final converse of an evil deed,
Here, here upon these trackless, silent slopes
Within the yellow reaches of the gorse
Lies Pelleas on prison-bed of thorns,
Bound with the glowing fetters of the sun.
O misery, that in his mind should dwell
Submission unto knaves, the lowered shaft,
The sunken sword, the battle void and thin.
Alas the name that rang in other days!
The knight whose deeds dwelt ever on the lips
Of others' praises — how with single hand
He smote the robbers of the woods and hills
With keen destruction — how within the lists
His spear was fire, a gathered shaft of light,
His battle-cry the voices of the storm.
And now his name is overset with growth
Of dark abuse and shameful calumny,
And those that should have reeled and sunk to earth
In red disaster and dark swoon of sense,
These, even these, mean varlets, thieves, and rogues,
Drag Pelleas through upland gorse and way
And throw him like a carcase for the birds!
[*He casts about him in the gorse.*]

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In vain: in vain. Oh, would that eyes were made
To pierce the barriers which hide their goal,
Or cleave like lightning in a darkened sky,
Bringing their own fierce strength wherewith to see.
Here, somewhere here, he lies in bitterness
With broken mail and battered helmet thrown,
A useless tool discarded from the hands
Of little workers fashioning misdeeds.
Etarre! Etarre! accursèd beauteous face
That shines like fire of madness in his eyes
And makes his courage falter like a flame;
Etarre! Etarre! from heaven's utmost height
May God's unfailing anger strike you down
And burn that body like a blackened tree!
May you be fire engulfed with water-floods,
May you be embers smouldered into death,
May you be ashes blown across the air!
I hate you! who are poison in my lips;
Within my mouth your name runs like a curse,
A thing to rail against with tongue and teeth.
[*He comes upon* PELLEAS.]
O mighty master — fallen, fallen, fallen,
See, I am here, your servant, nigh at hand
To raise you up, to loose your helm and mail
And with fresh water lave your sunken eyes
And wet your thirsty lips and cheeks and hair.
[PELLEAS *moves slightly, groaning.*]
Midway between the waking sense he swoons.
Ah, master, fallen master, turn and speak!

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PELLEAS

Leave me. Depart. I have no wish for you.
Go, bring me death to minister my needs.

FERGUS

Death's a false friend, a thief within your tents;
He'll stab you in your slumber. Cast him out!
[FERGUS *has been stooping above Pelleas. He busies himself in loosening the armour while he speaks.*]

PELLEAS

I'll have no other servant: bring me death.

FERGUS [*loosening the helmet*]

Death's a grim army laying endless siege
Against the living fortress of the soul.
Endure, endure; beat back the pressing foe,
Lift up again your shield above the walls
In stern defiance. See, I raise you up.

PELLEAS [*in* FERGUS' *arms*]

Leave me, ah, leave me here. My broken strength
Is fainter than a sunset wind, my mind
Is dry and empty. — Do not make me live,
But leave me, leave me here; Etarre —
I saw her not, nor heard her voice, nor felt
Her anger go across me like a rain.
God knows, such rain were welcome to my lips!
Her anger is more sweet than other's praise,

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Her voice is like a wind within the grain,
A moving swell of wave-like melody.

FERGUS [*raising* PELLEAS *to his feet*]

Her voice is like the winter moon half seen
Across the other shoulder, magical — a curse!

PELLEAS

Have you come hither mocking at my grief,
To cry before me words against Etarre
And prick my sorrow into festered rage?
No, leave me, leave me: what avails your heed?
I may not look upon her eyes again!
She will not see me, will not grant me speech;
Her wretched knights perform her word afar,
And cast me from her. Oh, world, world,
What cruelty there lies within your breast
To poison all the milk whereat we suck!
We are the children of your hate, conceived
In some dark moment of false passion, born
In anguish of repentance, things accursed
For whom you have no mother-love, no care,
No joy if we be happy, no regret
If we be clothed in sorrow and in grief.

FERGUS

Each man, if he be strong, can take the world
Within the grasping hollows of his hand
And shape anew the image of his will.
There is no knight of all this country wide

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Can sit his steed unshaken in the lists
Against your onset, none that can maintain
A helm unshorn, and armour unassailed.
What runes are carven by an evil hand
Within the iron of your spirit? Wake,
Throw off the clutch of sleep, the grasp of dreams,
And blow the wraith of magic into mist
Of idle vapour. Ah, if I were you,
My lance should smite the laughter of your foes,
My wrath should strike them like an angry sea,
My vengeance scatter them like autumn leaves!
Ride, ride against them! Snap their strength in twain!
Go like a curse across this evil land
And leave behind you weeping in the halls
And wail of women seeking 'mid the slain
For their departed lords: and she, the shining snake
That sits enfolded in your changèd heart,
She, even she, whose castle holds these lands,
Etarre, the witch of evil, let her die

PELLEAS

What, is your service changed to blackest gall?
Is all your heart tormented like your speech
With envious canker? O ungrateful task
To lift from earth the children of the dust
And give the toiling creatures of the plough
High freedom in a servitude of love.
Nay, who shall give the oxen of the field
The battle-steed's high temper, who shall place

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A soul within the body of a slave,
And waken knighthood stifled in the serf?

FERGUS

With no sweet ointment of forgiving love
Will I anoint the heads of those that feed
Their starving wits on hatred and foul thoughts.
To them that do you wrong I bear one love,
The love to see their naked bodies hang
From windy branches, and their vulture necks
Engirdled with the swaying, clinging noose.

PELLEAS

God grant you never set your feet within
The holy circle of knighthood! — Take me hence.
For I will wait until my body's harm
Be grown to match my soul's serenity,
The high security of my resolve.
Then shall I find me other ways to seek
My lady's favour, win her angry heart
To softer mood of loving.

FERGUS

Yet your words
Are greater than your strength. How would you walk
Through upland gorse and rough unlevelled way?
I cannot bear you far, tho' I am fain
My back should seek the burden.

PELLEAS

Search and say
If with your eyes you mark my loosened steed

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Among the heather ranging; for they came
And bore me bound thereto. You see him not?
Go, search the distance with quick feet and bring
Him hither straight; he has not wandered far.

FERGUS

Rest here in quiet till I come again
And wait in patience for my sure return.

[*He departs.*]

[PELLEAS *stands staring before him in silence.*]

PELLEAS

I would I were as changeless as the sun
Who sinks each day into the nether-mist
And on the morrow mounts above the dawn
In light undimmed; but I with shaken soul
Survey the darkness, and with faltering step
Go down into the countries of the night,
Not knowing if within another East
My eyes shall look upon the risen day.
All, all is dark: the hell-pits of despair
Gape ever at my feet. Where leads the way
That brings me to the daylight of her eyes,
The dawn which is her presence, and the world
Which is her body's grace, her beauty's orb
Of circled wonder? Barred and double barred!
There is no oaken shaft can break this port,
No twisted hook to catch the bolt aside.

[*Silence.*]

O sérene sun, alone and pitiless,
How mocking is the glitter of thy beams!

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Meseems thou art the laughter of the world
Made visible, contemptuous disdain
Wherewith all nature frames the race of man.
O shadow stretched before me on the ground,
What thing art thou, with what fidelity
Art thou my steadfast comrade? Is't thy wish
That binds thee, or a dread necessity?
Art thou my soul, an unsubstantial thing
Knit to me while the sun of life shall last?
The sun's a mockery, and life a lure!
Go! I release thee from thy servitude;
Thou canst not love me who am no man's friend.
Here in the world I stand alone. Go forth,
My soul, my shadow; seek a happier land
And leave this wretched body to fulfil
Unequal combat with a grudging fate
And so go down to death, all purposeless.

[*He becomes aware of* GAWAINE *approaching.*]

What knight is this that stands upon the hill?
Is this some foe to plague my restless life,
Some novel torment wrought against my love?
He moves alone, an armoured knight, afoot
Within these reaches of untrodden wild.
How came he here? Why moves he without steed
In painful toil beneath his armour's press?

[GAWAINE *enters.*]

GAWAINE

Long have I sought you, wayfaring alone.
In visionary speech with three, I gained
Strange knowledge and strange biddings to fulfil.

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PELLEAS

Knight, if on wrathful deed your steps be turned,
Let not your pride so wander from its ways
That it o'erstride itself and seek the dark
Of high self-confidence and vaunting word.
Fulfil your bidding, add your little stroke
Of evil action, yet at heart know well
By no necessity of fallen strength
I yield my honour to your lesser sword.

GAWAINE

You shall not find the hungry bird of hate
Upon my shield engraven, with fierce claws
Tearing the world asunder.

PELLEAS

Are you not
Of them that loathe me at my lady's will
And their own coward hearts' high jealousy?

GAWAINE

I am of Arthur's court. I come in need
To succour knighthood, as our king enjoins
Upon the glorious order of his knights.
I know not who you are nor with what wrong
Pent up by men's ill-will and jealous hate.
Yet three there were who spoke in visioned speech
And by their power on heaven's high elements
Conveyed me hither.

PELLEAS

O belovèd sound,
The speech of knighthood in this wretched land,

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The light of honour risen in the dark
Of shameless men and unrepentant deeds!
Pelleas I am: my spear has held the prize
In many tourneys made in many lands.
Much have I heard and loved your noble king.
The name of Arthur is a silver star
Of truth and equity; in faultless strength
The sword of chivalry gleams there aloft,
A vision unto men, a creed for faith.

GAWAINE

And I am Gawaine, of the king's high court,
Come hither from the walls of Camelot.
The fame of Pelleas has pierced the dark
Of distance, with the light of far renown
For tourney's wreath, and battle's blameless meed.
Our noble order knows no nobler knight.
What fateful force of men iniquitous
Or deed self-willed has brought you, armed and lone,
To stand upon the broom's flower-gilded heights
And gaze across the stretch of wind and sun
On warring wastes where no man's hand is set
Compulsive o'er unwilling growth of fields?

PELLEAS

Alas, this tale runs back among the years
And far beyond the present sight attains
Its first awakening.

GAWAINE

Yet would I hear.
I seek adventure and I strive to bring
Knighthood's redemption into creedless lands.

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PELLEAS

One word there is, which shuts and opens wide
The doors of all my deeds and all my thoughts:
It is a sign wherewith to clothe my soul
In courage linked from bright security;
It is a charmèd ring, a circled rune,
A treasure-stone of wizardry — Etarre!

GAWAINE

The name I know not, but am fain to hear
This mystic potency, enfolded deep
Within a word's soft-sounding innocence.

PELLEAS

If you would hear, and track the winding speech
Through courts of men and castles set anigh,
I have no need to hide on lying lips
The truth wherefrom my knighthood gets its shame.
So hearken: — in the eager days long since,
I know not how far back, for memory stands
In helpless failure at the count of time
So wretched and so slow to drag away,
Perhaps ten years are flown, enough to fill
A stripling youth's advance to manly state, —
Long time, long time, how long ago it seems —

GAWAINE

Nay, well I know the adverse wind of fate
Clouds all the backward years and hides the sun
Of memory in a grey forgetfulness;

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The past becomes a lost and distant land
Where once we moved and shall not move again.
But for your story. — Speak, and tell the tale.

PELLEAS

Magic of forge and steel and crucible
Had wrought a sword; by whose hand, no one knew;
'Twas thought the workers of the hills had steeped
Their fires in incantation and had made
This sword to be a gift to mortal child,
A king's son of the western isles, who died.
Golden the hilt, alight with ruddy glow;
Thereon engraved, in token of its gift,
"The son of Ork. Be strong and hold me fast."
Now, when the king's son died, his father called
A mighty tourney in the land and set
This sword as guerdon to the winning arm.
And many came and made their name be cried
Within the tourney, and King Arthur's knights
Were gathered, ten or twelve, and Kay was there
(Him whom they call the Seneschal), Sir Tor,
And many others. So the joust was made.
Great ladies, queens and nobly born, beheld;
And one there was whose eyes were like a fire
Within my heart, and ever as I strove
Her beauty shone about me like a star,
And in mine ears I heard a crying voice,
And felt a throbbing of unmeasured strength
Which of my body made its minister
To triumph in the tourney. So I fought,
And over all prevailed.

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GAWAINE

Then are you grown
A giant from the strength of lesser men;
The hard-wrought prowess of each vanquished name
Like hound that changes master comes to you
To aid you in the quest for fame, and swell
The cry of hunting.

PELLEAS

In my hands they set
The tourney's meed, the gleaming hilt of gold
That clasped the flash of steel; upon my head
A golden circlet clung. And I, forthwith,
Rode down the lists, and passed with heedless eyes
The rangèd queens, and at the shining feet
Of one more fair than kingly daughter cast
The golden circle, royal crown of love
And adoration; but with mocking hands
She flung it from her, high above the heads
Of those who sat about her, that it fell
Within the dust and turmoil of the lists.
And many there cried out with jealous speech
And wrought her shame, until I made be known
That I would prove her every act and word
Against their gathered spears: thereat they ceased.

GAWAINE

Strange tale it is, yet not too hard to read.
She loved a lesser knight and with sure strength
Spurned proffered homage of his vanquisher.

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PELLEAS

Nay, in that quiet heart of hers there beats
No blood of passion. Dark indifference
With sluggish stream mounts ever in her veins.

GAWAINE

What came of this?

PELLEAS

Into her rightful land
I followed her; and there I still abide.
Against the sky of my desires and deeds
There stands, with distant battlements agleam,
The castle of Etarre, undimmed, unchanged,
While over me the seasons spend their wrath
And men work out their hate; yet I prevail.

GAWAINE

What brought you here alone and without steed?

PELLEAS

The hands of men across the thorny wild.

GAWAINE

In anger, or by your own spoken wish?

PELLEAS

In anger done, yet by another's will.

GAWAINE

Why seek to hide the need? Within a glass
I saw a knight whom other three unbound

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From belly of a steed, and with rude strength
Dragged far across the barren fields of gold.

PELLEAS

Ah, I am shamed forever in your sight

GAWAINE

True knighthood never sleeps with naked shame,
And though he share her hovel leaves therein
No children of ill fame. Your courage shines
Through all the shrouds of dark ignóminy.
Pure spirits cannot err.

PELLEAS

O noble creed,
That brings the eye to witness, not to judge
Ask what you will.

GAWAINE

I ask your present need,
And give you service of my sword and spear.

PELLEAS

Strength will not ease the tightened cord of hate,
'Tis drawn too high above an earthly reach.

GAWAINE

The sword of courage and the spear of truth
May yet avail. Who were these wretched three
And by what order moved?

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PELLEAS

The self-same word:
It is a light for knowledge.

GAWAINE

Speak! Etarre?
And is it she who brings you into wrong?

PELLEAS

Because I may not live sans sight of her
I ride against her knights in mimic fray
And suffer them to make me prisoner
That I may come before my lady's eyes
To look upon her countenance and hear
The wonder of her speech. In wrath alway
She cries against me and commands her knights
To cast me into dungeon or to set
The brand of shame across my fallen shield

GAWAINE

Were these her men that wrought you this despite?

PELLEAS

Her will through others moving, cast me here.
And now the last sweet flower of hope is dead,
Trod under by her foot. The autumn grows
And winter creeps along the leafless cold,
With mortal fingers plucking branch and twig
And blowing harsh against the feeble strength
Which is the life of man and beast and flower.
My hope is dead; I shall not see it more.

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GAWAINE

If hope through snow and chill of winter love
Has ever blossomed in your heart, and spread
Its balm of perfume through your wounded soul,
'Twill reach its flower once more against the sky
To catch the sunlight in its chaliced cup
And nurture trustless sorrow into confidence.

PELLEAS

This is the last; beyond this utmost bound
Nought further lies: love, life, all, all at end!
She will not suffer me her presence' grace,
But strikes me from afar with other hands.
To-day, I saw her not; her worthless knaves
Fulfilled her final anger, bringing word
More bitter than their curses and their blows.
"O fool," they said, "our lady whom we serve
Bids us to tell you that until she die
She will not look upon your loathèd form
Nor hear your wretched pleading." So they spoke,
And dragged me hither with full jest and jeer.
Accurst be all the forces in me pent
That out of shattered body, darkened brain,
Build up anew the empery of life,
The realm which I *must* rule, unwilling king
Of citizens that hold me prisoner
Within the palace of my self. Have end,
O dreadful powers working in the dark;
Have end, and let me die!

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GAWAINE

Nay, live, and love!
Or if you may not love, then hate; but live!
Life is a present moment, a shifting point
That moves from nothing into nothing; where it is,
There is the world, the beating pulsing world
With all its marvel of a felt design.
Stretch out your hand and snare the fleeting point;
Then have you all the world within your grasp.
Live, live, and I will aid you in your quest.

PELLEAS

What can you do? For many a month and year
I dreamed that love would waken in her breast.
A fool, I dreamed that mortal will could guide
Love the immortal, Love the uncompelled, —
From impious effort gaining due reward,
Sadness of heart, bruised limbs, and shattered faith.

GAWAINE

Is there no gentler word which I may speak?
May I not plead before her, win her heart
To softer ways and kindlier moods?

PELLEAS

In vain.

GAWAINE

May I not say she has misjudged, has scorned
That which no queen may purchase with her crown,
A lover's worship, gift of gifts?

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PELLEAS

In vain.

GAWAINE

Then let us find some subtler web to catch
Her fleeting love and bring it to your lips.
If she be mortal, she shall yet be yours;
If pity stir within her, let us make
A staff of pity; if within her dwell
A woman's worship of high deeds and thoughts,
Then let us make high thoughts and deeds our scrip
To help us in our quest; if fear of death
Live in her body, death shall be our shoon
Wherewith to walk; if dreams of love
E'er stir the curtains of her sleep, then love
Shall be a cloak and clothe us from the rain.
Pity, high deeds, and love, and fear of death,
Shall be to us cloak, shoon, and scrip, and staff,
And from her we'll get alms.

PELLEAS

In vain! in vain!
You would with naked strength and covered wiles
Beget from hatred tears, from loathing love.
I tell you, not with open pomp and power
Love enters in. There is a world unseen
Wherein our passions live, and come and go
When no eye marks them. In the world of sense
Our words and deeds have puissance, and the earth
Trembles before our coming; blown with pride
We stretch our sceptres toward that other world

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And lo, the wand whereat earth's kingdoms shook
Stands idle in our hand, a gilded stem.

GAWAINE

And yet Etarre shall love you; grief and fear
Are masters of the soul, and work their will.
Love is their servant; they but clap their hands
And he appears. Give me your knighthood's trust
And by my knighthood's faith I swear to you,
Etarre shall love you.

PELLEAS

O mistaken creed!
Is love a hound that walks within the leash?
Too long, too long in folly I maintained,
Seeking to win her love. Love comes not thus.
We know not when nor wherefore, we have seen
No shadow fall across our steps, nor heard
His mystic footfall; yet we raise our eyes
And lo, he stands before us, garbed in white,
Triumphant, with a light upon his brows.

GAWAINE

Nay, call him and he'll come, a willing slave.
God gave him unto men, that men might be.
Hearken and heed: your shield and helm and sword
Shall change with mine. So armed, and with a steed,
Will I approach the castle where Etarre
Holds state aloof.

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PELLEAS

What then? She'll love me more
Because you hold my arms?

GAWAINE

Nay, hate you less.
Death breaks in twain the stubborn plant of wrath
And treads to earth its growth and jealous fruit;
He lays his finger on the lips of hate,
And anger stands with saddened eyes downcast
Before his presence. In the camps of war
He binds proud nations with a chain of tears,
And with a mound of earth builds emperies.
Etarre shall hear my words of bitter weal
And think you dead. Thereat her brow will change
And all her nature be suffused with grief;
Th' unshaken headland of her wrath shall sink
Within a sea of tears. With sudden ray
Illumined, she shall see life's large expanse
Move like a landless ocean, vast and void.
So will her heart be caught with sudden love
And she shall hate me, and against my name
Cry murderer. Her body's burning light
Shall languish in the sable cloth of grief,
Affliction's gloomy cloak; her cheek shall pale
With wan reflection, like the moon that broods
Too much upon the splendour of the sun.
Then will I cry her pardon of my fault,
Confess you living, till the glad blood leap
Through all her veins and mantle in her brow.

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She shall give thanks to Heaven's holy power
That held you safe; to all, she shall proclaim
You loved and dear; and she shall bid me go
To seek you out and bring you to her arms.

PELLEAS

So, with the breath of falsehood you would blow
Love, like a wooden vane that points the wind?
The gust of truth will veer it straight once more!

GAWAINE

The winds must change; the north must yield to
south,
The breath of snow be melted by the spring,
And hate must falter at undoubting love.
Give me your shield and sword, and let me fare.

PELLEAS

Shall love's high course be furthered by deceit,
Blessed by false words and hastened by false wiles,
And crooked path lead straighter to the goal?

GAWAINE

Yet paths that cannot scale a naked cliff
May find soft slopes to guide a sure ascent
On other sides. What matter for the turn?
Give me your shield and sword, and let me fare.

PELLEAS

I will not. 'Tis by other ways I seek
To win to her pure truth and faultless love.

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GAWAINE

Are you a fisher who with straining net
Enmeshes ocean prey, and at the last
When silver fishes struggle in his grasp
Throws back his booty to the waiting sea?
The years with eyes of pity have looked down
Upon you, and in restless flight o'erhead
Paused for a moment with a prophecy
Of other years to come.

PELLEAS

And now?

GAWAINE

And now
The time is here with open-handed gift,
And you would spurn it! Oh, how vain are thoughts!
They have no more reality than mist
Which sunlight scatters: 'tis the deed that *is*.
Three days, and you shall lie within the clasp
Of golden arms and hear from burning lips
Love's true confessional, the marriage night.
Will you then doubt she loves you? Will you smite
Her mouth and call her lips a liar's tool
And cast her from you? What shall matter then
The means whereby we strove and wrought, and gained
This loved reality, this goal of all your thoughts?
If she be brought to love you, then she loves,
And on it there's no doubt.

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PELLEAS

But in my heart
Doubt raises tumult like an angry sea.

GAWAINE

A stormless sky shall lay its waves at rest.
Etarre shall love you, by my word and truth!

PELLEAS

O fond belief, that wings the heart
As feathers to a bird new-born
Wherewith to leave the nest of pain
And seek the lands of gold!
Give me your oath of knightly faith
That you are herald in this act,
Not wooer.

GAWAINE

For that jealous word
I give you pardon.
[*He stretches out his hands and touches* PELLEAS' *sword.*]
Hilt and bar and blade
Be record of my oath; sunlight and wind
Maintain it; honour keep it fast. I swear
By Arthur's knighthood shining in the skies
Of false enchantment and black cowardice,
If I be found unfaithful, changeful, false,
May my bare throat feel this unsheathèd blade,
May I be cast for ever from the light!

PELLEAS

Across despair's black-vaulted firmament
Your words have moved refulgent like a star

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Which angels hurl from heaven to guide men's steps
On stormy nights through treacherous foul ways.
Words lie too lightly on the lips of man
That I with words could thank you.

[*He loosens his helm.*]

Take my helm,
And here my shield.

GAWAINE

The sword — ?

PELLEAS

I cannot give.
"Be strong and hold me fast," so runs the rune.
Through dungeon keep, through false defeat, foul hands,
And knaves' dark roguery, the rhyme has wrought;
Unharmed the sword abides. Take shield and helm,
Therefrom the tale has evidence enough.

[FERGUS *appears over the hill.*]

And here at time's full flood my servant comes,
Called by the present need, — and yet, alone;
Wherein our need is desolate. He went
To seek a mount, yet comes with empty zeal.

[FERGUS *at sight of* GAWAINE *stops, alarmed. Reassured by* GAWAINE'S *attitude and bearing, he advances.*]

GAWAINE

Armed and afoot, I cannot far proceed.
Yon castle on the deep horizon's rim

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Beckons and nods with greeting from afar
In vain civility. Stands nowhere nigh
Some hermitage whence I may find a steed?

PELLEAS

My man-at-arms knows well this waste of land.
He shall inform us. [*To* FERGUS] So, in idle quest
You sought?

FERGUS

Sir Pelleas, the steed I found.
He waits beyond the slant of yonder rise.

PELLEAS

What mock of service have you hid herein?
I bade you lead him hither.

FERGUS

How? with wings?
He cannot mount the sudden sheer ascent;
But thither I can bear you, where he waits.

PELLEAS

Then thither lead Sir Gawaine.

FERGUS

Shall he ride
And you remain?

GAWAINE

Shall squires-at-arms protest
When knights hold counsel?

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FERGUS

Good sir knight, oft time
The fool's hid wisdom guides the king aright,
The jester's bells sit steadier than the crown.
I guard my lord and master from deceit.

PELLEAS

I pray you pardon him, a faithful servant,
Who errs too much in serving and in faith.
[*To* FERGUS]
Sir Gawaine goes to plead before Etarre,
And win me favour.

FERGUS

Favour in love's cause
Is not a ring to slip on other's hand.
The pleader pleads but for himself.

GAWAINE

O vile,
O base earth-born, were you my serving man
Red stripes should leap across your quivering back;
The dogs should laugh at you and loll their tongues
To see you lower fallen than themselves!

PELLEAS

Sir Gawaine, pardon. Much adversity,
On me descended, has made dark his mind.
He probes forever in suspicious depths,

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And where he thinks to find an enemy,
His very soul drips poison and his words
Are but the distillations of his thoughts,
The gathered fumes and acids of his brain.
He shall repent and serve you loyally.

GAWAINE

Then let me go forthwith and seek the steed,
And so depart. My helm and shield I leave
In pledged exchange. When twice the sun has set
And twice arisen, messenger shall come
And bid you to the castle of Etarre.
Till then, farewell.

PELLEAS

God speed the ventured aim.

FERGUS

And you, O master, what of you alone,
Wearied and hungered on the shadeless hills?

PELLEAS

Go seek for me from distant hermitage
Another steed. By sun-down be returned
And bear me hence at last.

GAWAINE

Farewell.

PELLEAS

Farewell.

[FERGUS *and* GAWAINE *depart.*]

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PELLEAS

[*alone, watching the two move across the brow of the hill*]

So fare, my heart's adventure, so fare well.

CURTAIN

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ACT TWO

SCENE: A room in the Castle of ETARRE. *Tapestries upon the walls. The late afternoon sun streams in through a solitary window. Its shaft of light falls full upon* ETARRE, *who sits before a loom set in a recess. She is working at a tapestry, now nearly finished. A maid,* AILEEN, *attends her.*

ETARRE

And one more colour to enrich his crest.
Shall it be scarlet?

AILEEN

Would not blue lie well?

ETARRE

It shall be scarlet. He shall flash and burn
Like dew sun-kindled with a thousand sheens.
Where hangs the scarlet thread?

AILEEN

Here at the wing
From this last dripping stain.

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ETARRE

The sun a-mist
On autumn afternoons so stains the world;
A noble colour for a crested plume.

AILEEN

Yet blue were softer.

ETARRE

You are bitten deep
With this sea-madness; in your own blue eyes
Nought's fair that is not blue.

AILEEN

The world's a-drip
With red and crimson, or you like it not.

ETARRE

But, look you, I have reason in my choice,
For red's the fairer colour. There is nought so brave
As scarlet banners or a crimson sky.

AILEEN

For them that like it. But the blue of streams
On summer afternoons 'neath summer skies
Gladdens my heart with deep and pure content.

ETARRE

And one lone spray of hooded red in flower
Cries louder than the murmur of your streams,

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The quiet of your skies. They are fancy-poor
Who love not red.

AILEEN

And false of heart
Who love not blue.

[*Sings.*]

Love came to me in kirtle red,
(Honour's false and Faith is dead);
Came again in kirtle blue
(Honour's fair and Faith is true).

ETARRE

You're quick in mocking me with children's rhyme.
Make me a rhyme to mock this rainbow bird
Whose crest is finished. How he sweeps and flies!
Come, I'll begin it.

[*Sings.*]

On the wind there flies a bird;
He is come from distant shores,
From the dawn's unopened doors
To the western gates unstirred.
In his wingèd flight there run
Colours of the setting sun.
Do you end the song.

AILEEN [*singing*]

Eyes and lips and sweet desires
Are but feathers for his wings,
Burning love the song he sings;
All thy hope and thought are fires
Giving light unto his eyes;

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Life and youth,
Beauty, truth,
Are the strength wherewith he flies.
Snowy breast and golden hair
Are but plumes for him to wear.
He shall sing a summer's day,
Clap his wings, away, away.

ETARRE

Ill caught. You've made your bird too like to Time,
The raven dark who speeds across the world,
And dressed him in fine colours like a daw
Which steals strange ornament.

AILEEN [*singing*]

Silken raiment wherein dressed
Beauty shimmers half divine,
Glint of jewels, rare and fine,
Are but colours for his crest,
Crimson colours for his wings;
Hark! 'tis love whereof he sings!
Brave and gay, a summer's day,
Ere he flies away, away.

ETARRE

I like it not.
It troubles me with some half-dreamed lament,
An unknown broken promise, I know not
To whom, nor for what purpose, made. Poor bird
Here woven on the loom, thou art maligned!
Thou art pure fancy of mine inmost dreams,

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Not touched with these gross images of earth.
Thy colours are imperishable light
Caught from the steadfast sun and held secure.
Thou'lt never fly away, but here remain
To be mine eye's interpreter of joy,
To hang upon my castle walls, and sing
Thy crimson colours in sheer ecstasy.

AILEEN

Ay, let him live in silken thread and woof;
There is a bird which flies from mortal grasp.
Most fair he is, to perch upon our wrist
With flashing colours, and from sunlit throat
Pour forth his flooding heart's high melodies.
In every word you speak, he trills and sings;
In every motion of your hand, he moves
With wings aflutter; in your brightening eyes
He lives triumphant: oh, beware, beware;
Too soon he's gone, and in the dusk and chill
No nightingale shall waken into song.

ETARRE

What mean you? Life and Youth and Happiness?
I have them in sweet surfeit.

AILEEN

And of love?

ETARRE

How many times did I forbid his name
And cast him from my highest battlement?

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With subtle track you turn upon my words
And lead me toward that monstrous loathing, hid
In all your thoughts. Shall I not be content
With golden solitude, that I must bind
Love's naked body to my car of dreams?

AILEEN

A maiden's eyes, a maiden's wise,
The open gates of paradise.

ETARRE

What mask of rhyme holds revel in your brain
That you make mock of me?

AILEEN

A loveless fate, and Eden's gate
Is barred with double sword of hate.

ETARRE

Have done! have done!

AILEEN

Flame that burns not, stream that flows not,
Maid that loves not, Eden knows not.

ETARRE

This is an old wives' song, a ragged cloth
With halting stitches sewn in knotted thread,
And you would clothe me with it like a queen!
I am content with life; you'd stir the stream
To waters turbid as the floods in spring.

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AILEEN

I pray for love's awakening, to end
This dream that hides its own poor solitude
In deep illusion of a soulless life.
My heart can do no more.

ETARRE

Not more, yet less,
And cease to weary me with hopes and tears.
Your tongue moves ever in the wells of speech
Drawing new wonders to the light of day;
And chief there-mid the curling snake of love
Winds envious through all your words. Have done.

[MARIS *enters*.]

AILEEN

And here comes one to guide you in your ways,
To steep your heart in cold indifference,
And marble every living pulse and vein.

MARIS

I pray you, give me moment's grace, to cross
Your silken fancy with rough thread of care.
I have been troubled with much thought of late;
Our silent halls have heard my pacing step
And stared in dark displeasure, matching frown
Of sullen stone to sullen brow of thought.

ETARRE

Has Care thrown nets within my castle-yard
Or brought us siege? We'll catch him prisoner

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And show him forth. Speak on, lay bare his haunt;
Pull down his hiding place and hale him out.

MARIS

Your eyes have seen him, many a day that's past.
He will not be gainsayed, but comes again
With unstilled clamour to our quiet walls.
He carries armour like a knight, has shield,
A spear, a sword, yet will no battle bear;
We drag him out and cast him to the wilds,
Where nature tends him with her healing dew
And dries him with the sunshine and the wind.

ETARRE

Pelleas.

MARIS

The orbed and golden fire of day
With no more steadfast pace in heaven's track
Returns to us: yet one gives light and warmth,
The other is a flame within our fields
That must be quenched.

AILEEN

Flame quenches flame, but sword
Can cut it not.

MARIS

Here's parable enough
To quench the very sun in ignorance
And cloud the light of reason in our brains.

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ETARRE

Her idle speech yields up its idle tale:
To all her riddles waits a single key,
A key which I have dropped in blackest moat.

MARIS

You've carved a rune to clear a parable.
Your words are like a flight of wingèd birds
Crossing from sea to sea above my head;
I watch them pass, yet know not where they go.
But as for Pelleas, we'll speak of him;
He has a malady which eats his life
Like rain upon a sword-blade, turning steel
From flash and splendour into edgeless rust;
Deeper and deeper sinks the water-drop
Till all's corroded and the biting teeth
Of slow destruction meet from either side.
And such a sword is worthless unto men,
Fit for quick burial. In short word and brief,
For Pelleas I come, to counsel death.

ETARRE

You'd have me slay him!

AILEEN

Overstepped indeed!
He runs with too great fury.

ETARRE

Shall my name
Be joined with murder's most ignoble rout
And brought to silence?

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MARIS

Not in cruelty
I come. There are some souls so weighed with life,
So deep in sorrow, so oppressed with ill,
That death comes like a prison-keeper kind
To strike away the chains of their captivity.
The holy Church's covenant of hell and heaven
Is but a prophecy of that unmeasured dark
Wherein the dead find sustenance and life;
And men in their last hour come down unto the strand
With all earth's hills behind them, and the level sea
Ready for new emprise unknown and unexplored.
Death is the hand that sends them from the shore,
And death the wind that swells within their sails.
And unto them that walk with leaden eyes
Viewless and vacant as the staring blind
Through life's harsh country, weary and despaired,
To them, you call it cruelty and hate
To give them vision of th' eternal sea
Which leads into th' unknown? Oh, be assured
That Mercy, queen of heaven, with backward grasp
Beneath her grey-starred gown holds fast a sword,
And unto some poor souls, in gift of gifts,
Brings not fine balsam, but the edge of death.

ETARRE

What charge is this; am I then merciful?
Did mercy move me through the days and weeks
Of his imprisonment, when he was cast

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To sleep among the nettled dungeon-holds
And pray for sunbeams in a lightless pit?
Did mercy move me when with jest and jeer
You dragged him in the dust of horses' hoofs
Or cast him in the sight of beast and bird
To be their mockery? Freedom I sought.
Slaves can be cruel, and I was worse than slave,
Tormented with the thought that I was strong
And he was weak, yet he with all his cries
Made day a nightmare, and within my breast
Dried up the wells of pity. Idle hope
That I should turn against myself, and walk
On paths of mercy!

MARIS

Slay him and be free.

ETARRE

Slay him, and hear the owl at nightfall cry,
And watch the rooks, wind-blown above the towers,
Circle and caw, while all with self-same voice
Say "Murderer?" Slay him, and think the dew
Is born of lamentation, and the wind
Is come on wings funereal and wild
To scream for vengeance from the fiends of hell?
Slay him, you say, and watch the lips of men
Curdle against me, till my frenzied hands
Are clapped above mine ears to hide the sound
Of spoken evil? O unhappy, I,
Laden with unpremeditated wrong
Which will not alter. Oh, unhappy grief!

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AILEEN

How changed is your contentment, torn aside
To bare the inner sorrow of unrest.
Oh, leave these false pursuings; be at ease
With woven pictures and imagined scenes
And make not real the dreams of tragedy.

ETARRE

Dreams, dreams, false shadows, phantom thoughts,
How I am wearied of their flapping wings
Across the twilight of imagined worlds!
There is a change within me of new hours
And other suns; I could be kind or cruel
With unsuspected tenderness and hate.
There's something born within me, great and strange,
A child of impulse, wakened in my veins.
I'll have no more of dreams; come take this loom
And set it forth to other hands. And now
We'll hearken, Maris, to your deathly plaint.

AILEEN

I wish you were not wrought of changeful mood.
But late, you spoke of solitude's content
And wove yourself a golden web of dreams,
And now you've torn it like a tangled fly
Within a spider's mesh that's spun too weak.

ETARRE

Too weak it was; I've torn it with a word.

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AILEEN

And with a word rebuilt it many a time.

ETARRE

The spider's dead; he'll weave no more. And now
We'll listen, Maris, to your plea of hate.

MARIS

'Tis not in hate I urge it. Well you know
I bear no hate to mightier knights than I.

ETARRE

And well you know I loathe your Pelleas
And turn all praise of him to darker speech.

MARIS

Still darker speech has gone abroad, to stain
The honour of Etarre and all her knights.
There is a tale now told in other halls,
And false it rings, and yet, alas, is true.
It tells of one lone knight who puts to scorn
Dungeon and steel, a foe who will not fight
Yet always conquers. Men speak hard of you
And call you vampire, sucking might and power
From lovelorn men. If this continues on,
Before the year's end Camelot will hear,
For Arthur's knights ride fast through all this land.
If you would keep untarnished light of fame,
This Pelleas must vanish from the land,
And mouths of men gape empty of ill words.

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ETARRE

And if they know I slew him?

MARIS

Not by guile;
By open battle in the sight of men.

ETARRE

And who is there in all this land of mine
To battle with Sir Pelleas?

MARIS

Even I.
For he is fallen from his ancient strength
Till I and he are grown one force in arms.

ETARRE

And if he slay you?

MARIS

Then my cause is lost;
I bear the sorrow.

ETARRE

If he will not fight?

MARIS

We'll give him open choice to fight or die
And love of you will guide him in his choice.

ETARRE

And then he'd slay you! I have seen his spear
Go down the lists and ravish charging steeds

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Of their proud burden. I have seen his sword
Shear crest and helm, and leap through buckled steel.
He'd slay you, slay you, and with eager cry
Come throw himself before me, plead for love.
No; other ways there are wherein men die,
And I, the vampire of the strength of men,
Shall know a better counsel.

[*A horn is heard.*]

Hark, a horn!
Go bring me news. Return with every speed.

[Maris *goes out.*]

Look from the window; is there aught to see?

Aileen

The sinking light of day on field and moor,
A flight of birds, the moving heads of grain,
The leaves ashiver on the trees; nought else.

Etarre

What meant that horn? Is Pelleas returned
And have my knights brought me but empty words,
Boasting completion of the unfulfilled?

Aileen

It cannot be. Some other danger calls;
For Pelleas is cast upon the hills
And comes not riding with imperious haste
Of new adventure.

Etarre

Year and threefold year
Unvisited of danger, I have held

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Communion with the change of day and night;
Wrapped in the quiet of a warless land
I have forgotten ravaging and death,
As one who inland dwelling on the hills
Forgets the loud-tongued clamour of the sea
And thinks to measure fierceness of all storms
By that weak wind that plays upon the moor,
Forgetting all the wrack and thund'rous surge
Which sweeps to ruin: on a sudden day
He comes unto the cliffs and hears the sea,
The menace of the waters holding guard
Before the portals of the earth. So I.
And here is war with brazen throat and strong
Come crying at my door, and I have slept.

AILEEN

Here is no tramping of the hoofs of war;
Some messenger on peaceful journey bent
Craves food and shelter, giving in return
The last hot news of joust at Camelot
And feast of Arthur's knights, the noble tales
Of battle unto giant and to dwarf
In magic wood and isle snake-habited;
Fen-dwelling sorcerers and craggy fiends;
The last sad word of knights no more returned;
Court-news and scandal, like a spider's thread
That waves in th' wind, seeking whereon to build.

ETARRE

Whate'er it be, my warders stand at guard
In quick restraint lest any enter in,

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And unexpected come, and unannounced.
Where's Maris that he waits so long?
[GAWAINE *enters, with helm and shield of* PELLEAS. *The visor is down.*]
Who's here?
Pelleas? Quick, help me! call for Maris! help!
Help, Balarin and Avran, Erse, and Dane!
Is no one here to help me, none to come?
O treachery outdark'ning all belief!
What! none, not one,—one man to bring me help?

AILEEN

He dare not so assail you! If he come,
I'll cast myself against him, break his path,
And hamper him till you be fled.
[GAWAINE *stands unmoved, leaning upon his shield.*]

ETARRE

What! still?
No motion, no advance to pluck me hence?
You're harrier and I the song-bird caught,
And you leave sheathed your claws? What, great of heart,
You dare so come, and offer me, not death,—
No! that's too little for your hungry soul!—
But kindness and a sword that holds its sheath?
You dare so stand before me, raise no hand
To bring me hurt? You dare humility?
O impudence that mocks my woman's strength
And spurns all vengeance, every stroke of sword!
You've slain my knights or caught them with some trick,

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You've made me here defenceless to your might,
And now you stand before me dumb and still
And speak no word and raise no awful hand.

AILEEN

Shall I bring aid, go search the battlements,
Call every serf from labour, strip the fields?
He will not dare assail you.

ETARRE

Here abide.
I need not man's assistance; woman's will
And woman's word borrow an unknown strength
When wrong's at issue. Here, in last defence,
You stand on trial, plead a mortal cause
Before an unrelenting judge. Have care
Of every moving word and springing phrase
Lest they o'ertip the balance with false weight.
Much have I found of blame and heavy fault:
A restless spirit walking in the night,
His mantle blown by gust of unseen winds
Across the darkness toward the home of storms
Where stars and sun are hidden; so he moves,
Wild-eyed with some new vision drawn aghast;
And this is he who makes my life a curse,
Pelleas, the knight; for him make your defence!
What! not an outburst of an injured love?
Are not those furnaces of passion stirred
That shone so ruddy in the dark of hate,
That burned upon the hill-tops of abuse
Like beacon fires, those furnaces of love

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That once consumed your soul to ashen drift
And made you like a coal that's burnt to th' end?
What! not a word? no, not a single word?
Is all your life's endeavour stricken dumb?
Then hark; for them that will not plead their cause
Judgement is given. You have sinned too much
To keep the water's surface; lead, and more than
lead,
Drags at your body, and the stream's quick flood
Closes above you, who are judged and damned.
A thousand ways you've found in your offence:
Your shadow has been dark on all my paths,
A fiery shadow burning grass and herb.
You've eaten out the petals of my life
And strewn my happiness like withered leaves
On autumn walks; you've been the wind and rain
To hold me prisoner beneath my roof
Longing in vain for sunlight and clear skies.
You've sinned too much against me, you have
moved
A hundred feet beneath my castle walls
And with huge shoulders shaken keep and tower;
You've caught the lightning on the barren wild
And driven it against me like a hound;
For like the stroke of earthquake underground
Or bolt of errant flame across the night,
So have you shaken me and burned my sight,
So have you cast my life in monstrous ruin
And blackened all the walls of strength and love.
For this you have no penitence, no grief,
But are returned like hawk upon his flight
To seek anew the victim you have struck;

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But I am changed to poison-throated snake
With deadly venom poised upon my tongue
And all my body tense in gathered coil;
No harmless serpent of the fens am I,
But an undreamed and deadly throat of pain;
I call you to that sombre house of rest
Wherein all men must while eternally.
I have been bitter; drunken deep in words
I have assailed you; now I speak no more.
Prepare you for your death. I seek my knights.
[GAWAINE *raises the bar of his helmet.* ETARRE *starts aghast.*]

GAWAINE

There is no need. I am not Pelleas.

ETARRE

What knight are you? Oh speak, how came you here?
What dark intent of silence led you in?
What will you of me? Are you rapine's hand
Or stroke of vengeance, war's untimely sword,
Some miracle of quick disaster sprung
From seed unplanted? Speak!

GAWAINE

Gawaine am I,
Knight of King Arthur's Court, of royal kith.
Deception's mask no guiltier purpose hides
Than from your love and anger to extort
A knowledge in each mood of praise or blame
And learn if I win favour for my deed.

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ETARRE

What deed? You've slain my knights?

GAWAINE

They are unharmed.

ETARRE

Are they not stricken and not captive bound?
Do men-at-arms still hold their watch and guard?
How came you here? Were all my servants false?

GAWAINE

Smooth words and promise of high recompense,
An oath of loyalty unto your cause,
A servitor of yours that knew my face
In other days and other lands — no more;
These were enough to gain my entrance here.
Your servants sought to serve you as they could,
Thinking to win new favour through my aid.
Deal not too harshly with them, but on me
Turn all the passion of your fit rebuke.

ETARRE

I have no heart to chide a noble knight
Well known in Caerleon's court. But answer me,
This shield so quartered, see, I know it well,
Yon helm with the green plume half caught aside,
These are of Pelleas.

GAWAINE

From him I took them.

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ETARRE

You've slain him or but made him prisoner?

GAWAINE

Not made him prisoner.

ETARRE

Then slain?

GAWAINE

Yea, slain.
In battle smitten to the final breath.

ETARRE

Dead, Pelleas! Now let the hooded sun
Break forth in splendour, let the golden moors
Proclaim thanksgiving from a thousand flowers!
Oh, I am as the earth, with winter bowed,
Who sudden feels the weight of snow and frost
With one great stroke from his twain shoulders cast,
And leaps unto his feet, and calls for Spring.
For I had taken resolution dread,
And death was all about me, lithe and dark,
To haunt my footsteps and in silent halls
Afflict my purpose with the nightmare forms
Which Horror views with shuddering lidless eyes
Or with fixed stare pursues. Join exultation
And be aroused to song, my silent heart;
We are of much relieved, our troubled days
That were as night's dark pall of mist and cloud,

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Are turned to smoke upcurling in the sun,
And vanish in the clear expanse of light.

GAWAINE

Have you no pity, are you carved of stone?
This is unholy so to cry and sing,
To whet rejoicing on the steel of death.

ETARRE

Is it unholy for the wanderer
Through night's black pitfalls and most secret lures
To hail the sunrise with a joyful song,
Knowing he walks securely on his way?

GAWAINE

I could not slay a man, with such wild heart!

ETARRE

It is not I who slew him! Oh, be glad.
Look you, I am most merciful and kind;
You know not all my history of grief,
You know not how he came across my life,
Black thread within the weaving of my joys!

GAWAINE

Noble he was, and glorious in strength.

ETARRE

Whereof I had much cause of bitterness.
We thrust the dwarf aside, spurn him the path;

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The giant brings us terror in our knees.
Oh, had he not so noble been, so strong,
So burning on the lips of man and maid,
So high redoubted in all mighty arms,
I would have pitied him, not hated to the last.

GAWAINE

Have you no sorrow now, that he is dead;
Have you no word of praise?

ETARRE

Oh, ask me not;
But unto you who brought me into peace,
All gratefulness of heart, all kindly words.
Be welcome to our halls, and bide with us.

AILEEN

Shall I prepare a chamber for our guest?

ETARRE

With every speed. Let Avran know of this.

GAWAINE

I cannot here abide. My journey calls.
I was on idle mission sent and vain.
I must go hence again in haste.

[AILEEN, *at a sign from* ETARRE, *goes out.*]

ETARRE

Oh, stay!
It is unkindness to defeat all thanks

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And set true praise at loss; you render base
Her whom your kindness most has cherishèd,
Most nurtured into grateful ways. You spurn
The springing blade of recompense, and flee
Before its growth has quickened into leaf.

GAWAINE

A truer deed, that is not done for gain.

ETARRE

Those purposes were never truly sown
Which no man bides to reap; but like the wind
You've scattered bounty with a careless strength
And run abroad intent on other joys.
The harvest threshers mock with plundered chaff
The wind that sowed and knew not how to reap;
Be more advised and with more human grace
Glean recompense and store the golden grain.

GAWAINE

With how persuasive touch you lull asleep
The serpent-heads of honour. 'Tis too late,
For they have set their fangs within me deep,
And I must go.

ETARRE

For honour? Is it honour
To trample welcome underfoot, and turn
With angry frown from greeting to farewell?
Does honour quarrel with hospitality
And virtue with all kindness?

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GAWAINE

Ask my Wish
And learn it does not with my Will accord;
Prove Inclination, and 'twill here abide,
But speak to Duty, Knighthood, Self-resolve,
And they will cry "To horse!" and ride away.

ETARRE

Is it Ill-will that plucks you by the sleeve,
A servant in high banquet come to call
His master forth on other needs?

GAWAINE

Ah, no;
For admiration pours me heavy wine
Of looks and words persuasive to the sense.
I pray your pardon if I seem unkind:
There is a vow which bids me hence.

ETARRE

A vow?
Of fasting and of shelterless advance
Through rainy ways and dripping nights a-cold?

GAWAINE

A vow most recent to impatient lips,
To further love's advantage.

ETARRE

Then remain;
Tell me the tale and I with woman's heart
Can find a surer way than quickest wit

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Of man's device. Thus shall you hold the vow
And further love's advantage.

GAWAINE

'Twere in vain;
For she is hard of heart and loves him not.

ETARRE

Is he of manner lovable and kind,
In birth accepted and in courtly ways?

GAWAINE

All these he is, noble and great and true.
Knighthood he honours, and the halls of men
Which feel his stately presence. Such an one
Is like a crown upon the head of kings,
Adorning them with beauty. He is strong
As mountain elm or heaven-cresting pine,
Yet in his deeds more gentle than a child
And in his thought as pure.

ETARRE

'Tis you that love.
Could she with such enamoured eyes behold,
The earth would shrink to nothing at her feet
And he would stand alone against the stars,
A hero, crowned with passion, as with light.
In other guise she knows him, be assured,
And finds some deadly fault whose clinging tooth
Tears at his virtues and with venomed drop
Discolours those fair tints wherein he shines.

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Can you not say with what quick wrong estranged
She holds him from her?

GAWAINE

By a wilful mood,
A child's unreasoned passion of dislike.

ETARRE

There is an eye more deep than reason set.
False-shadowed forms deceive the fleshly sight,
False words with reason dally, lead astray
The wisest thought; but this is undeceived.
Have you not marked how the untutored wild
With thoughtless vision of pure sense discern
Their friends or enemies in humankind?
And so with woman when she loves or hates.
Ask why the leaf unfolds to April rain
But lies close-hidden from the winds of March.

GAWAINE

Did I not say, "In vain"? My mind forebode
A fruitless mission. Therefore, let me go.

ETARRE

Is this a snare of wisdom curling round
Into unreason? You go forth in vain:
"Therefore," you say, "make haste!" Nay, therefore bide;
If you are so persuaded, that your words
Can never waken love in this Unknown,
This obdurate and loveless Beautiful

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Who spurns this knight of yours and will not heed,
Then bide with me, and feast with me, and dream
Of more successful loves, more gracious toils,
More sweet acceptance. You are welcome here,
For you have freed me from a deep distress
Which boded worse disaster, drawing on
With monstrous shapes and dreams of murdered men:
For with my own weak hands and woman's strength,
Goaded by anger, driven by despair
I should have bartered Pelleas with death,
And sold him to the fearful hands of night
To be their captive, gaining in return
From that grim changers'-table quick release
And freedom from the bonds of hate.

GAWAINE

In vain!
Did I not say, "In vain"? — This murdered knight,
This Pelleas, was noble-souled and great
And women loved him.

ETARRE

Like a strangling noose
He clung about my heart; through pulse and vein
A clogging hatred thickened, and my mouth
Grew dry with anger and unbidden rage.
But tell me why you slew him; not in hate,
For praise you speak; and not in rivalry,
For great you name him.

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GAWAINE

'Twas a slanderous tale
Against your beauty and your name. To him
I told it; and in sudden fire he shone
And with his sword and spear proclaimed you true.

ETARRE

Who bade him praise me? let my word and deed
Be their own champion, dress their shields alone
And ride to battle! Was my hate in vain
That he should hound me with remorseless love?

GAWAINE

For you he died.

ETARRE

And I shall bury him
And on his mound set an ungraven stone,
That I may cast him alway from my mind
As life has cast him from her herald's scroll.
But you who from the one have purged his name
Shall never from the other be effaced.

GAWAINE

I pray you let me now depart in peace.

ETARRE

By all the sacred bonds of gratitude
I fetter you and hold you now in thrall.
By courtesy of knighthood, by the grace
Of man to feebler woman, by the strength
Of that great company of Arthur's knights,

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By creed of chivalry and law of faith
I conjure you, remain!

GAWAINE

Accursed vow,
What evil have you brought me! Will you come
And cry fulfilment of your darkest word?
For I must bide and to the utmost proof
Display that broken embassy of love
Whose hopes are all in vain!

ETARRE

Like stricken priest
Who sees temptation writ on every wall,
Wide-eyed for sustenance you murmur prayer.
Am I a creature wrought in deadly shape
Of mortal passion, that with quivering fear
You dare not here abide and with me feast
Holding high converse of adventured deed?
You do offend me with ungracious thoughts
And with unworthy shaft suspicion point.
Yet shall you be forgiven with full heart
If you from stern intention draw aside
And turn to kindness. For three nights and days
Let helm and breastplate join with greave and spur
Unstirred in idleness.

GAWAINE

With eager hands
I lay aside the heavy press of mail.

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ETARRE

My knights shall swift disarm you. Here remain;
My servants shall attend you.

[*She leaves the room.*]

GAWAINE

Fatal vow,
For thee I am assailed. How hard of heart,
How cold to pity is that glorious form,
That haunting presence! Yet, what body's grace
Here shone about me! with what subtle charm
Of pleading voice and of unveiled desire
She bade me welcome! Nay, not ice and stone
That lovely breast, though it be white as snow
And like unsullied marble carven out.
O honour, bide with me, unshaken, strong;
O knighthood, watch above me. Deep events
Have wrought me danger. O thrice wretched vow
That makes my path a journey through the dark
And spreads disaster wide on every hand!

CURTAIN

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ACT THREE

SCENE: Three richly bedecked pavilions, the central one in the foreground, the two others set further back. Draperies and silk hangings. The curtain of the central pavilion is drawn aside to reveal the decorated interior. Within, and near the entrance, are seated GAWAINE *and* ETARRE. *To the left, through the branching trees and above their summits, the walls of the Castle of* ETARRE *are dimly visible. Toward the right, a gentle slope descends to a thicket which shuts off the view. The last colours of sunset are in the sky.*

ETARRE

Now sinks the day beneath the western rim.
Night's hooded shepherd gathers-in the light
And drives the crimson and the purple hues
From highest heav'n unto their twilight fold;
There shall they sleep till morn upwakes anew
And sends them forth on eastern pasturage.
O golden cloud, farewell; and yonder, too,
Which like a billowed sea upon the West
Heaves ruddy flame. Farewell, sweet colours all;
The night makes shut the heavy doors of sleep
And seals the portals with a silver star.

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GAWAINE

Dim silence flings its misty veil abroad.
Hark! how the birds are stilled, and one by one
Drop off to slumber.

ETARRE

Soon the hornèd bat,
Shy lover of the twilight, soft of flight,
With ribbèd wings in noiseless here-and-there
Will weave the darkness; and the searching owl
Will be a shadow-phantom clothed with sight.

GAWAINE

Gone is the day, and now another sun,
Another taper in th' eternal halls,
Is quenched for ever.

ETARRE

So the breath of night
Moves down the long expanse of kindled flames
And one by one makes dark the future days,
Until the last weak taper is blown out
And night unending rules the sunless world.

GAWAINE

Let not the sadness of departed day
Weigh present joy with far fore-boded grief.
Night robs us not of vision, though her hands
Pluck down the light from heav'n and bind our eyes.
Night clothes herself in beauty like a queen

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And robes her naked body with soft folds
Whose half-concealment makes more rapturous
The deep allurement of her charms. The day
Is but a meadow garlanded with flowers;
The darkness is a forest, deep and far,
Where wonders move in every rustling leaf,
And every footfall of the wind foretells
Some mystic presence. In the noonday sun
We see too well, and thence see not at all;
But in the night our very spirit wakes,
And with more gleaming power than day-lit eyes
Reads deep the world's enchanted rune. 'Tis Night
Who unto our most sacred thought and word
In birth brings forth the beauty of the soul.

ETARRE

With quiet hands she lights her waiting stars
And sends them forth to wander in the skies.
O Night, sweet mother of eternal calm,
I owe thee penance. Thy bright brother, Day,
Has lured me with his colours.

GAWAINE

See, the East
Is spreading silver cloth of woven light.

ETARRE

The little people of the hills and meads
Now hold their gathering at full of moon,
With grave debate enacting law and will

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Whereby to rule. In angry conclave set,
They gird their resolution unto war,
Till beast and bird are stricken by their wrath
And cry full penitence.

GAWAINE

This is a tale;
Yet in this land are wonders strange enow
Which I myself have witnessed.

ETARRE

There be three
Who hold this land in power, and with strange skill
Ordain the deeds of men. They oft appear
To travellers intent on distant ways
And by a gift of favour bind their will.
These three have you encountered?

GAWAINE

Even they.
What shall their craft portend?

ETARRE

Nor good nor ill.
My knights in journey unto other courts,
My men from field returning at the dusk
Have met these three and for some trifling grace,
A draught of water or a sprig of thorn,
Been bound to choice, but having mid the three
To one assented are unharmed released.

[*The moon rises.*]

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GAWAINE

Whence are they, and with what malign intent
Draw toll from men?

ETARRE

This no man knows or deems.
They are of mist and water, and their ways
Are as the air phantastic or the clouds
Which change their shape to every wilful mood.
But this adventure comes from many lips
And I would hear some deed of sword and spear
Wrought by your hand alone, and from your lips
Alone recounted. Were you not of they
Who sought the Grail through lands beyond the sea
And wrought adventure such as none had dreamed?

GAWAINE

A future quest, forever unfulfilled;
A lure across the rainbow to the sun!
'Tis present always and yet never here.
May I not be of them who make this life
A great To-be, a vision and a dream.
Has earth no riches, that we ride aquest
To find the silver path beyond the moon?
Are there no flowers save those which other walls
Enclose for ever from us, and no streams
Save those beyond the trackless rocks, no sun
In our own heav'n and no portentous stars
Save those which others see? O wretched souls
That spurn the wine of life, and drain the cup

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Into the basin which is never filled,
Where all the lees of mad desire run down, —
The Unattainable, the great In Vain!
It is enough for me that here to-night
I feel the soft sweet air and view the stars
And hear your voice beside me. 'Tis enough
That love is beautiful, that life is great,
That old age is not come, nor winter bleak.

ETARRE

The year looks backward with half-wistful face
This autumn night; the air is soft with spring
And lulls the senses to a sweet repose.
So is it on the first warm eve of May
When earth, expectant of an unseen grace,
Awaits it knows not what, all awed and still,
And thinks to hear across the sleeping hills
The footsteps of divinity returned.

GAWAINE

And not in vain; for God, each Spring, descends
In guise unseen to shape the world anew,
To plant desire in every fleshly form
And resurrect the world from winter sleep.
Meseems, to-night He is returned to earth
And with soft wand of vernal sorcery
Brought back the Spring, and in our sleeping souls
Awakened voices singing through the dark
Like birds beneath the stars, to fill the night
With rapt enchantment.

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ETARRE

Mystical delight!
Awake, awake, O sleeping birds of song!
Awake within my heart, O silent birds,
And fill the night with music till the stars
Tremble in adoration! Have I lived and breathed
These many years, these sombre silent years,
Or was I numbered with the dreamless dead,
Encharnelled in a palace, deep entombed
In empty vault of daily thought and deed?
Like them that walk within a sleep wide-eyed
And deem themselves awake, so have I lived, —
Nay, so been dead, and deemed myself alive.

GAWAINE

Do you not feel a pulse of eager blood
Through every vein, striving with beat and throb
To rouse the broken armies of the spring,
And hear the stamping of the hoofs, the cries
Of mounted knights to battle riding down?
They are reclaiming to their empery
The autumn year, and winter's pagan horde
Falls back before them.

ETARRE

Not in earth and air
Alone they conquer, but in human mind
They set their banners and in human heart
Stir high their beacons.

GAWAINE

Yea, in thine and mine,
Held captive to them here beneath the stars.

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ETARRE

The flames leap heavenward with growing beam
Of kindled passion. O mad heart, wild heart,
Why do you beat so fast, why leap and strive
Like wild thing netted, caught within a snare
That leaves it free to struggle? O sweet heart,
Be still, be still!

GAWAINE

O sweeter lips, speak on;
Or better, speak no more; but unto mine
Make harmony of silence and desire.

[*They kiss.*]

[*From the pavilions in the background is heard a voice singing.*]

SONG

When bleak December bares the hills
And snowflakes curl in air,
When hoary January chills
Young hearts with old despair,
When February plucks the day
And plumes the stormy night,
When March winds prowl in quest of prey
And battle with the light,
By river marge and reedless lake
Love makes her weary moan,
"O April sun, awake, awake!"
She sings alone, alone.
O hearts of men, make penance due
When April draws anear,
For life is false, but love is true,
And Spring is here, is here!

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GAWAINE

O singing voice, the year is old and grey,
Unto the tomb totters her shaking step.
September has from April stolen dress
And you by quick illusion are deceived.

ETARRE

One day, one night, one shift of moon and sun,
Each year are stolen from the hoard of Spring
And unto Autumn given. On that eve
All flowers, unknown to sleep-enchanted eyes,
Break into blossom from a withered stem,
The trees are clothed in leaf, the faded stars
Put on new splendour, and the drowsy earth
With glow-worm hangs each branch and dewy bower.
It is the year's farewell festivity
Ere love be quenched and winter cold return,
Ere bird fly southward under warmer skies
And fourfoot beast to sunless lair retire.

GAWAINE

But we unharmed through rainy nights and chill
Shall hear the storm about the towered walls,
And in security close-wrapped shall laugh
When winter's frosty fingers pierce and pry
At every stone and corner, and the wind
Cries like a beast unsheltered through the night.
Yea, thou and I, caught in each other's arms,
Shall dream of stormy battle overhead
When winter with the giants of the north

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Sweeps down across the hills and smites the plain
With desolation, when above the dead
The whirling snow in burial descends,
When waters are bound captive in strong chains,
When wells are sealed, and rivers turned to stone.
And I will tell thee many a tale and strange
Of dark enchantment wrought in waking dreams,
Of magic lawns, and flowers that backward draw,
Of shields that burn in flame, and helms that raise
Quick serpents clutching the unwarded blow.
So shall we hold the icy fiend at scorn
And waken endless summer in our breast,
With love to sing to us, and love to clothe
Our souls with gladness and our hearts with peace.

ETARRE

How many times I love thee, whom three days
Have scarcely crowned, whom speech and look
and thought
Have scarce revealed! And yet a thousand suns
Could with no lordlier radiance bind thy brows
Nor with more light illumine.

GAWAINE

Thou art dear
As pearl deep-hidden in the lightless sea
Which careless net a-search for other prey
By chance drags upward to th' astounded light.
One glance alone, one beam of shafted day,
The wretched fisher clutches priceless wealth
And needs no knowledge wrought of week and year

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To teach his fortune. So art thou to me,
Revealed and perfect in an instant sight.

ETARRE

Hold me yet closer, let the living world
Sink from me like wild stars that seek the night
And downward vanish in the vast obscure.
Quench yonder gleams that hold the dark in power,
And ban yon moving shield of argent beam;
Veil moon and stars, and draw me to thy own.

GAWAINE

O best endeared and sweet belovèd form,
Thou art the earth's most precious heritage.
A thousand years, she fashioned in the dark
With labour and sad toil, and brought thee forth
To be her fairest marvel all unstained.
Thou art of summer nurtured, light-enwrought,
Cradled in southern flame.

ETARRE

The silent years
In their dim fastness of forgotten days
With virgin toil unrecompensed and lone
Have fashioned me and brought me to thy lips.

GAWAINE

And now like shrouded mantles of the dawn
Soft falling from the shoulders of the sun,
They do reveal thee, girt and crowned with love,
Thine inmost self, for utmost worship meet.

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ETARRE

They have deserted me, like startled birds
Rising from nook and deep recess of rock
And wheeling, wheeling higher overhead,
Till with a sudden impulse they depart
And leave the watcher on the silent shore
Alone and marvelling. So have they fled,
My years of childhood and of maiden thought,
My lonely years of growing womanhood,
And I am left alone with love and thee,
While at my feet the waters smite the shore,
Wave after wave, in-coming from the deep.

GAWAINE

Of that great time-swept ocean have no fear.
The future is a snare to lead the eye
Toward far horizons clouding the unknown.
It is the present which our feet must tread
And there our vision is the most unsheathed
And we with least illusion can behold.
Think not of years, but grasp the present day,
And adamantine make the fleeting phase,
Arrested and in memory's stone held fast,
Carved with rich wonder, traced with strange design.

ETARRE

Ah would that Time thus stayed his course, or clipped
The present hour and left it shorn of wings
To be our prisoner! For evermore
Should I so cling to thee, my lips upheld

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For thy sweet ardour and enkindled mouth,
For ever so be clasped within thine arms,
And dure eternity in thine embrace.

GAWAINE

All things save this can might of love fulfil.
Love can of dew make pearls and emeralds
And build a palace of a ruined moat,
From deepest forest charm the wingèd bird
To minstrelsy and hymeneal song,
And from the mountains draw the sullen wild
To serve in quick attendance at the feast.
With power of shadowed dreams and quickening thought
Love is endowed: she chains eternal things
To be her servant, binds th' unwilling moon,
And draws the silver-threaded stars which weave
The tapestries of heav'n. The golden sun,
Which like a shuttle moves across the sky
With strands alternate of the day and night,
Becomes her slave and lives but for her word.
For they that love are rulers of the earth
And in their hands the future ages lie.

[*A nightingale sings close at hand.*]

ETARRE

Did I not say this night was caught from Spring?
Hark April's nightingale who turns the dark
To music, and with radiant voice proclaims
That summer is not fled, nor autumn here.
To bed! to bed! sweet bird; with weary eyes
You'll see the dawn if he o'ertake you singing.

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GAWAINE

And unto us that selfsame counsel turns
And bids us sleep. Good night, sweet love, good night.

ETARRE

Kiss me once more, till love be bared indeed
And I in sweet communion with thy thoughts
Be drawn into thy life and be a dream
Within thy mind, a pulse within thy heart. —
Kiss me once more, till life forsake his toil
Of mystic alchemy and hidden consonance
Of soul with body, till he break his glass
Wherein he visions that processional
Of generation unto generation matched,
That sequence of mankind and beast and bird
Which marks his handicraft: kiss me once more,
Until he merge my soul in deathless bond
To thine, and in eternal union join
Our mind and thought and will. — Kiss me once more,
Till heav'n and earth be reft of all their veils
And robbed of their mysterious dark conceit,
Till I behold the circles of the sun
And see the pulsing of the day and night,
Hear time upon his anvil forge the stars,
And be at one with universal might. —
Kiss me once more, and shatter earth and sky
Hurl all to dissolution, and with stroke
Of vast desire still that gigantic heart
Whose beating is the living, moving world.
Leave me alone with thee, set round with night,

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In universal dark of boundless space,
Alone, alone. — Kiss me, and so good night!
[*She rises and comes forward to the entrance of the pavilion, where she stands gazing out.*]
How silent treads the night, how soft and still,
With finger at her lips to hush each sound,
That none of those who bide beneath her care
Shall with uneasy dreams be stirred, and wake.
Sleep soft, ye woods and meadow-lands,
Ye silent leaves and sleeping flowers.
Pale primroses, and daisies, ye sweet eyes
With which the earth looks out on heaven,
Be still; all, all, be still.
Farewell, ye stars which overhead
Drift by with distant song.
Moon wide-eyed, watch well;
Watch well until the dawn.
[*She lets fall the curtain across the entrance of the pavilion, thus shrouding* GAWAINE *and herself from sight. The moon has now risen high above the trees and bathes the stage in silver light. A soft wind stirs the leaves. Their rustling is taken up and transformed to music, — at first scarcely audible, but gradually growing in intensity, — representing the sounds of a late summer night.*]

[*The music stills.* PELLEAS *and* FERGUS *emerge from the thicket on the right.*]

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PELLEAS

Stay still: no further move. Our question here
Shall find its answer.

FERGUS

Know you what this means?

PELLEAS

Rejoicing and festivity.

FERGUS

The rite,
Of burial.

PELLEAS

What mean you?

FERGUS

That the dead
From battle ride not home. You are betrayed.
This is rejoicing for your death, festivity
To honour him who slew you. For she holds
That Gawaine with true victor's right and might
Carries your shield and helm. You are betrayed.

PELLEAS

Though mine own eyes beheld, I scarce should hold
That such a knight to such a vow were false.
'Tis Gawaine, born of Caerleon's royal blood,
Whom you, low-born, attaint. With deadly vow
He swore him faithful, and in utmost pledge
Bound life and body to fulfil my love.

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These were his words upon my sword-hilt sworn:
"If I be found unfaithful, changeful, false,
May my bare throat feel this unsheathèd blade,
May I be cast for ever from the light!"

FERGUS

The vow is forfeit. Go! reclaim the oath.
They have no fear of you and set no guard.
Etarre believes you dead, and Gawaine laughs.
She shall remember that the dead arise
To wreak their vengeance. In these tents are hid
Sure proofs and testimony.

PELLEAS

There remain,
Within yon thicket hidden, till I come.
[FERGUS *draws back out of sight.* PELLEAS *advances up the slope toward the central pavilion.*]

PELLEAS

Is this the timid prey which ran to earth
Close harried, and like mole which dreads the light
Drew shut her portals? This is she who feared
My least approach, who with armed battlement
Greeted my coming and with moat unbridged
Bade welcome. These soft silks and drooping fanes
Point mockery, as though they scorned to hide
That which they cannot guard.
[*He has approached the curtain of the pavilion.*]

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So comes the thief
At dead of night on foul endeavour bent,
So peers to left and right with fearing eye,
And so on tip-toe to his booty draws.
O watching powers of darkness and deceit,
Grant that I be the very thief and true,
And not myself the stolen-from, the robbed,
The injured one down-tracking to his lair
The plucking knave and claiming back his own!
[*He raises the curtain and peers in. After a moment he suddenly starts back.*]
O sight too horrible for mortal eyes,
Burning the eye-ball with a blackened scar
Of infamy and loathing! Oh, be blind,
Twice injured eyes. Look not again on light.
Clothe yourselves round with darkness, and forget
This fatal gift of seeing! O accursed,
O nest of shame breeding repugnant brood
Of broken oaths and false virginity!
Now is the scroll of knighthood ended; fame
Forsakes her ancient stronghold of renown.
The days of chivalry are past, and knights
With plea insidious of inviolate oath
Work treason and adultery. This was Etarre,
The maiden ivory in her chastity,
With eyes downcast for fear of shame; and now
Her lips are drawn apart with hungry sin
And like a serpent feast on evil fruit.
O night, how canst thou sleep so still? Up! Wake!
With hundred voices clamour at this deed,

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And loose the hell-hounds of your winds and storms
To sweep into destruction's cloven pit
This treachery and crime! O bitterness of man,
To see his life down-trodden and the dust
Of wild despair heap charnel mounds and whirl
In mockery, while Heaven lifts no hand,
The oceans are unmoved, the river-floods
Within their channels tarry, wind and fire
Their ancient office elsewhere do perform,
And moon and star smile in serenity!
Forsaken, thrice forsaken, with his grief
Man wrings no pity. The great world is stone;
God holds himself aloof, cold, passionless,
Wrapt in designs of far eternities.
Spurning the race which shudders at his feet,
He fashions future kingdoms. Weak, alone,
From death unsheltered, bearing wounds and ill
In life upgathered, man cries out in vain
For judge of evil, champion 'gainst the wrong.
But I, though I be so forsaken, scorned of God,
Unheard of earth and Heaven, yet shall I
Fulfil my vengeance, with unaided hand,
And right the wrong and champion the true!
False Nature, cry farewell to children twain
Whom thou hast nurtured into infamy;
Thou canst not save them! here, against thy will,
I slay them, and in mockery of thee.

[*Lifting the curtain of the pavilion with one hand, and with the other holding his drawn sword, he enters and disappears from view. He re-emerges.*]

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And is it manhood so to halt and fail,
To hide the sword of vengeance in the sheath
Of pity? Thought and deed wage mutual war,
And deed is conquered; the weak thought prevails.
So let them sleep; I cannot slay them now. —
[*He turns to go, but halts suddenly.*]
What, let that injury to all my hopes
So slumber on, so let that shameless word
Sleep unavenged? —
Ah me, how still they lay!
Gawaine at peace, half god-like in his dreams,
And she like carven statue motionless,
Her lips half smiling, her dark-lidded eyes
Soft closed, and one white hand against her breast
As though her lover still within her clasp
Lay sleeping. —
O deep misery accursed
To find Etarre at last, and find her so!
Am I by craft of wizardry encharmed
That all my thoughts are shades and fleshless dreams?
With maiden weakness here I stand and weep
As though I had no strength of hand, no sword
To bring me vengeance, and no warrior's will
To punish proved deceit and oath forsworn.
Unto my mercy's prayer I cast Etarre
For pittance, but my anger's deadly curse
Shall Gawaine take, and with the stroke of death
Drive out his soul from earthly dwelling place
And ban for ever from the living world.
[*He re-enters the pavilion. After a little, he re-emerges.*]

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Sleep on, sleep on, I cannot slay you here.
On field of battle, waking and full-armed,
I'll slay you; but not here, not now, asleep,
Unarmed, defenceless. Though you traitor be,
Of knighthood's stroke unworthy, yet am I
A knight, and with that sacred oath am bound
To slay no sleeping man nor foe unarmed,
To battle with the sword and not, as they
Who slay their sheep for feasting, to approach
With sharpened knife the victim's helpless throat.
Not so in cowardice was knighthood framed,
Not so adorned for valour. Nay, sleep on.
You've wronged me more than thousand deaths could pay;
To take a single life so wretchedly
Were but a mockery of payment. Nay, sleep on,
And if your dreams affright you, be at ease;
For that grim shadow, standing at your bed
And with malign intent upon your life
Down-gazing, is departed and returns
No more to vex you. Ay, sleep on, sleep on.
[*He proceeds down the slope. At the foot of the slope he is met by* FERGUS.]

FERGUS

And was it other than I said?

PELLEAS

Full well
Your heart's malignity foretold me truth.

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FERGUS

Gawaine is false?

PELLEAS

The night with darkling robe
No falser thing conceals.

FERGUS

Where are they hid?

PELLEAS

Yonder pavilion holds the twain as one.

FERGUS

Then have you slain them, meted that reward
Alone sufficient and well-earned?

PELLEAS

They live.

FERGUS

You had not power, not opportunity
To fall upon them; they were held in guard
Or otherway from you removed?

PELLEAS

Unwatched
Their couch, unarmed they sleep and lone.

FERGUS

And are not dead! Are you of honour reft,
Of resolution shorn, of anger void!

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Unmoved you know yourself betrayed and spurned,
Laughed at and mocked, your prize of ten long
years
Snatched from you in a day, and all your life
O'ercast with sorrow. Have you not a sword?
Do swords not slay? Alas, suspicion grows;
This is not Pelleas who held the field
Of armoured knights at nought! This is a shade,
And Pelleas by years of pining love
Is grown too frail for manhood, and too weak
For anger. Quick, take sword, and slay;
Set seal of blood on this foul testament.
Match deed to deed. Send me with hungry knife
And I will slay, and take the fault, the shame,
If you have found a fault in such a right,
A shame in such a work of injured honour.

PELLEAS

I cannot slay a sleeping knight, nor turn
The pointed sword against a woman's breast.
Let us depart this most unhallowed spot
Lest quick contagion which is here abroad
Should with its ill infect us.

FERGUS

Unavenged
You would depart, and leave no trace behind,
No proof of anger, no memorial
To that dishonourable union set,
As though you were the spirit of the wind
Across the moors, trailing nor track nor sign
To mark your presence? Shall they wake at dawn

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And fill another day with wretched love,
And deem themselves secure and laugh at thought
Of Pelleas?

PELLEAS

Well said, a sign, a sign
That I am not a shadow, but a man,
A fleshly thing with mortal strength of arm,
A threat of punishment, a deadly fear
Unsilenced in their hearts.

FERGUS

Ay, still their hearts.
This is the sign I meant, the sign of death,
That all men may take knowledge to themselves
And learn what thing it is thus to forswear
All honour, and in treason to be false
To Pelleas. These two together slain
Shall be a history to all mankind,
A legend and a saying.

PELLEAS

Here remain
Yet once again until the deed be done.
I shall exact his oath.

[*He ascends toward the pavilion.*]

FERGUS

Praise be to Heaven!
The ancient valour is returned, to swell
High flood of vengeance and exact the oath.
How ran the words wherewith he pledged his life?

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"May my bare throat feel this unsheathèd blade,
May I be cast for ever from the light!"
Then is he slain.

[PELLEAS *enters the pavilion.*]

And yet his temper burns
Like sudden sun upon an April day,
Hot for the moment but too soon o'ercast.
Let me go up and strengthen his resolve
Lest at the last he weaken.

[*He moves toward the pavilion.* PELLEAS *comes out.*]

Ah, returned,
So soon returned. He had not time to fail.

PELLEAS

It is fulfilled. Across his naked throat
My sword has gone.

FERGUS

And he is slain in truth!

PELLEAS

Slain? Nay, not slain, but sleeping as before.
So let them sleep until the morning comes
To waken them and they behold my sword
Across their breasts, close drawn beneath their throats,
A sign, in symbol of a broken oath.
Come, let us go; the night draws on apace.

FERGUS

O idle hope to dream that he was dead,
By vengeance overtaken! No! return;

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Not so that oath was sworn, not such th' intent;
With death he bargained. Let him death receive.

PELLEAS

What I have done is with full purpose wrought.
Come, let us go; the night draws on apace.

[*They disappear into the thicket. A cloud crosses the moon, and a sudden gust of wind shakes the trees.*]

CURTAIN

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ACT FOUR

SCENE: In the Castle of ETARRE. *A hall, with windows overlooking a central court. Early morning of a gloomy day.*

ETARRE

Find me some counsel, for with wrath and hate
My senses are disordered. Let me turn
And hide myself for ever; here close-walled
Within my castle, let me sit and brood
On man's dishonour and my fallen pride.
Let me no more be seen of foreign eye
Lest memory's brand draw fire across my cheek
And I turn hot with shame. Ah, so deceived
And in deception so displayed to him
Who most was wronged! Speak! is there no escape?
Do all the paths draw close their hedgèd walks
And bar the way? And you who sang of love,
For day and night unwearied in your rhyme,
Know you no counsel?

AILEEN

None of wrath and hate.

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ETARRE

Shall I be loving? with corruptive name
Call falsehood truth and welcome all deceit?

AILEEN

You are not stricken so beyond all health
That you must turn to death for comfort, — ay,
Keep house with grief and marry with despair.

ETARRE

Then on my sickness lay some remedy;
Pluck me some healing herb of sweet advice.

AILEEN

Forgive, forget. These are most heav'nly sounds
Which to discordant actions concord bring
And work harmonious union. Gawaine sleeps
And of th' event knows nothing. Be as he:
Know not of broken slumber and a sword.
Nurture no counsel of unquiet mind
Against his fault; he loves you well and true
And there no falsehood lies.

ETARRE

Forgive! forget!
Forget that to these walls came Gawaine riding,
With victor's helm and plume, and with false word
Cried Pelleas dead? Forget my joyful praise,
My love which was but thankfulness of heart
Upraised in gratitude? Forgive the lie

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Wherewith he lured my thanks and bought my love,
The lie wherewith he sealed my lips and eyes
And to deep slumber bound me, while another,
Him whom he boasted slain, within my tent
In musing stood and saw me in my shame
And with a naked sword cursed me and him
With whom I slept? Forgive, you say? forget?
Not till the mated wolf forget his lair
Shall I forget, nor till the son forgive
The slayer of his sire, shall I forgive.

AILEEN

You judge too harshly, with a view too near,
Like them who hillocks into mountains raise
Because they stand beneath them, head thrown back
And eyes upcast, unknown that from afar
These hillocks merge into the level plain.
No deadly work of ancient kingdoms lost,
Armed hosts betrayed and knights in prison slain,
Has Gawaine wrought. He lied? nay, what of that?
With false pretence won favour? 'tis no crime.
He was with love intentioned: men are fain
To overstep the fettered pace of honour
When love's the goal. And do you think him base
Claiming another's death, thereby to gain
Your love, when to have held the ways of truth
Led to a loveless issue?

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ETARRE

You would make
Fair winds from stormy quarters blow, and set
The northern sun in winter skies. With words
False-founded on the marsh of shifting thought
You'll not persuade me.

AILEEN

But by surer proof,
Rock-built and firm, which never wind of doubt
Can shake to earth. Though Gawaine falsely wrought
And with dishonour entered covenant,
Let past be past, and mingle not its gall
With present mead, lest bitter be the draught.
Gawaine you love; and for that love's fair sake
Rouse not the past against him.

ETARRE

Love and hate
Hang not on every moment's fleeting lure,
But from dead hours and withered years depend.
Past thoughts do act upon our present mood
And get new children; men are fools, who think
This deathless creature, time, was ever held
Within the coffin: there's no hour o' the day
But lives for ever in unlessened strength;
No mightier love in earth or ocean dwells
Than that between the present and the past,
And none more fruitful. Ay, forget the past?
Forget the dark which quenches every fire

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Within my heart, and in unmindful bliss
Call Gawaine pure, a knight without a stain?

AILEEN

And is he so dishonoured?

ETARRE

Let me speak,
Let me be herald and proclaim his deed;
For now I mind me of a word he said,
A truthful tale for lying purpose told.
His was a quest to win a lady's love,
Not for himself, he said, — O guileful claim! —
But for another. I, with idle wit,
Knew not 'twas Pelleas of whom he spoke
And mine the heart which he was sent to win.
'Twas thus that with another's helm and shield
He came disguised; but not as conqueror, —
As servant bearing message to my halls.
And like a servant to his master false
He decked himself with borrowed finery
And played a stolen part.

AILEEN

'Twas not a slave
Who played the master, but the royal lord
In servile garb demeaned. You are unkind
To make comparison with things unlike
And thence draw profit.

ETARRE

He has cast aside
The cloak of honour, thrown the sceptre down,

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The kingly staff of faith, whereby we rule
Ourselves and others. Perjured and forsworn,
To knighthood false, to fellow-knight untrue,
He wrought upon me with unrighteous deed
Which to his oath proved mortal and betrayed
His embassy.

AILEEN

It is himself he harms,
Not others. Pelleas whom you never loved
Is not of love defrauded. What, forget?
You say to heav'n, you cannot so forget?
You have forgotten in an hour's short span
Ten years of hatred.

ETARRE

Nay! I love him not!
Yet, when I see a knight so wronged, the tears
Of pity well unbidden to mine eyes
In quick compassion; when I think on him,
Betrayed by Gawaine and from hope exiled,
Spurning revenge and to his sleeping foe
Soft pity granting, can I nourish hate
Against a grief so nobly self-endured,
Knighthood so proven?

AILEEN

What of grief he bore
Through ten cruel years, knighthood so nobly shown
In joust and battle, dungeon and disgrace?
Well, let him stand forgiven: light the fires

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Of your resentment, kindle torture-flames,
And unto Gawaine turn your restless hate.
Let him like purest ore be doubly proved
In midmost heat of anger, till the dross
Of foolish pride and guileful deed be shed
And golden faith emerge. He will repent
And with contrition turn to them he wronged,
Suing for pardon.

ETARRE

He shall sue in vain
If unto me he turn.

AILEEN [*at the window*]

Within the court
Rain-drops begin to fall; the western wind
From stormy ocean journeys, with the net
Wherewith he dragged the sea for water-drops
Across his shoulders flung, dripping with rain.
His cloak upcast, he hides the morning sun
And with his fisher's hat throws giant shade
On all the hills. Look well upon his ways,
For in your soul there strides a shadow vast
Hiding the sunlight of clear thought and love
With clouds of anger, fraught with fall of tears.

ETARRE

'Twas but a phantom sun at midnight sent,
A wisp o' the marshes, caught among the stars.

AILEEN

'Twas the great sun in heav'n, and you have spurned

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God's utmost gift, the light wherewith men see.
For love is as a light within the eyes,
And with it vision enters, bird and beast
Wax cunning, the fierce eagle's sight is bared
Where like a drifting point against the clouds
He holds his guard; swallows and singing birds
Gather their tribe and nation, and unvexed
Go pilgrimage; who guides them on their way?
Who taught the thrush to build his nest, the mole
To dig his halls and chambers? Well you know
Desire of life, desire of love, alone
Give these their knowledge; river-fish depart
On distant journey to the ocean stream
And yet return; the woodland deer with fawn
Sees huntsman while the hounds are yet in leash;
And arrows miss their prey in summer months.

ETARRE

Fine threads of fancy, airy webs of thought;
They touch me not.

AILEEN

Then hear a grosser tale.
It is not well that woman's hand should rule
By man unaided, for in weaker mould
Her body's strength is fashioned, and her mind
Trembles before assault. Bright fortune's star
Has watched above you, for the hounds of war
Have never drawn their trail across your land,
And that grim huntsman, who with double stroke
Slays foe and friend, has passed these regions by;

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'Twas far away we heard the clamorous tongues
Of questing hounds, and cry of men a-chase.
But war returns: one quarry run to earth
And slain in bloody moil, his hounds find scent
Of other prey. Across the harvest-fields
He spurs the hunt, through villages asleep,
By moat and grange, through breadth of all the land.
And when beneath your walls his bugles blow
And you with woman's strength of arm and will
Must bold confront him, you will shrink afraid;
The walls with stroke of iron-girded beam,
The shaken portals, towers down-ravening,
Shall with disaster terrify your sense.
Yield unto man his heritage of power;
His is the crown of courage, his the strength
Which bides unmoved the deadly front of war.
To man, but yesternight, you gave your love
And to his passion yielded sense and soul;
To-day you cry release and would reclaim
Th' irrevocable compact. — Let me speak!
You wrong me with your anger! At your gates
A wanderer stands, with staff and laden scrip;
Upon his brow is written peace, his hands
A scroll upraise; he bears the hidden sword
Of safety, and the cup of heart's content.
You turn him from your gates, because his feet
Are travel-stained, because he wears a cloak
From others taken, and the scroll reads false.
Be well advised; this pilgrim comes but once;
Throw wide your doors, cry Welcome, he is here!

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ETARRE

I close my portals to him; from the walls
I herald him be gone. You fan the flame
Of anger in me.

[GAWAINE *enters.*]

ETARRE [*to* AILEEN]

Let me be alone.

[AILEEN *goes out while* GAWAINE *is speaking.*]

GAWAINE

Must love at touch of dawn his dreams dispel
And from his kingdom flee? Through empty halls
I've sought in vain.

ETARRE

With scrutiny more keen
Instruct your failing eyes. I am not she
For whom you search.

GAWAINE

Why, you are changed indeed.
Are you some flower that blossoms in the night
And in the day with envious stalk of thorns
Enfolds its chalice? With unfriendly mien
You look upon me, warn me with set frown,
Chill me with loveless words. Are you not she
Who yesternight beneath the flaming stars
Vowed me eternal love? You are not she!
The day has raised its sword and cleft apart
That union of our souls. What have I wrought
Amiss, what deed to love untrue?

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ETARRE

Demand
Of your own heart.

GAWAINE

'Tis dark, pierced with no light
Of knowledge.

ETARRE

Nought is to you better known.
It is forever in your waking mind;
The day has written it in thousand hues
Across your vision; wheresoe'er you turn
'Tis burnt and carven in your inmost thought;
The cocks have crowed it in their morning song,
And every word men speak points thumb to it.
You cannot sleep but in your deepest dream
It shows its pattern.

GAWAINE

What is this you know?
Have I with slumb'ring spirit's drowsy sense
Some foolish tale unfolded? Men believe
The waking words and not th' illusive dream.

ETARRE

Your lips betrayed you not: they are too well
In silence schooled.

GAWAINE

Then is some message come,
Some lying tale from sland'rous lips of men?

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ETARRE

Nor spoken word, nor written.

GAWAINE

From the walls
You saw some vision to affright your mind
Against me?

ETARRE

Ay, the golden king of day
Held prisoner in gloomy halls: nought else.

GAWAINE

Why, then rejoice, and laugh at wind and rain.
Come, kiss me; and confess you penitent
That dawn should wake me in an empty world
And rob me of the fairest jewel of day.

ETARRE

Plant flowers to close the grave where murder lies,
With golden portal seal the beggar's hut,
But this you cannot hide.
[*From behind a curtain she drags out the sword of* PELLEAS.]
Know you this sword?

GAWAINE

'Tis but a sword: I know it not.

ETARRE

The hilt
Has graven letters: hearken their device,
"The son of Ork; be strong and hold me fast."

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GAWAINE

Pelleas! the sword! Tell me, whence came the sword?
Who brought it to your hands?

ETARRE

Who else but he?
Pelleas the slain, the dead knight from his grave!

GAWAINE

Through shadows of the early day he crept
And in your ear dropped poison? told you all,
With bitter words probed deep his injury,
And searched the vitals of his hate!

ETARRE

I know
But this, that Pelleas lives and can avenge,
That you have dealt with perjury and shame.

GAWAINE

You know that I have falsely wrought, have lied,
Worked with untruth: these things you know full well.
You know not that I was by Pelleas sent,
By him enarmed, trusted with tale of death.
You think not of the strife within my soul,
Unbodied forces in contention thrown
For mastery within me. Do you mind
How you with praise assailed me, with soft word
And glance? Not I, not I, who played me false,
But you who brought me ruin. 'Twas a vow,

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Upon this very hilt 'twas given oath,
And now it is betrayed. It was a knight,
Who in great tourney won this very sword,
And now he is betrayed. You ask me, Why?
With Wherefore vex me — you who know so well!
Your eyes, your lips, your body's silver form,
These are the Wherefore, these the cunning cause,
So deadly, so corruptive to the mind,
That were the deed undone, and I to choose,
I'd choose against all honour, and with you
Blind out this pallid ghost of knighthood, drown
Reproach, and strangle recompense.

ETARRE

Away!
Mine eyes are stricken with the sight of you
And inward turn, praying for some release
From this most bitter vision. You have dared
To wed me with the broken ring of faith
Forsworn; you've snapped in twain the lute of joy,
And Happiness, bright minister of God,
That solitary hermit who descends
But once a year from his eternal rocks
Into the market-place of men, you've crowned
With crown of thorns, dealt stripes and buffeting
And sent him back into the desert heights
To weep forlorn. You've brought me grief and hate,
And now 'tis I who wronged you, I who led
Your helpless honour to dishonour's grave!
Away! and come not ever to these halls

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Lest I forget my woman's heritage
And like a man avenge me.

GAWAINE

Give me word,
And let me speak. For much pleads with my cause
And with me makes defence.

ETARRE

The very night,
Which shelters crime and to the deeds of sin
Accords its refuge and unhallowed screen,
Betrayed you. I have heard and seen and judged,
Yea, judged too kindly, leaned too much aside
To mercy. Go! And if you here remain,
You idly wait: here shall I not set foot
Until within the court I know the hoofs
Of your departing steed bear from my life
Its cruelest injury.

GAWAINE

No steed have I
Who am alone in all the land.

ETARRE

Then take
From out my stables. Quick! make haste and go.
[*She turns abruptly and leaves the room.*]

GAWAINE

So shatters that mysterious glass of love
Wherein delight was mirrored; so departs

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That glorious ray, and so the night returns
With all its solitude. Lo, I am cast
For ever from the light! Farewell, Etarre;
You were unkind, and with a passion's storm
Brought devastation to the garden-close
Wherein love blossomed. Wrath and fiercest hate
Were never of a speedier onset borne,
And the red flight of hell was never stirred
To such a fury. On the mound which marks
Your love's decease, my thought shall plant a spray
Of budding thorn for memory. Mighty Heaven,
That on our thought and action holdest count,
Bear witness in thy universal scroll,
I am misjudged! [*pausing suddenly*] Or am I
judged aright?
To quick repentance should I turn, or hate?
Be scornful or be sad?
[*He turns to go.*]
What's done is done.
Close meditation's gloomy book of fears;
I'll read no more in it.
[FERGUS *enters.*]
Who's here?

FERGUS

I came
With other hopes than these, nor thought to find
Gawaine within the land.

GAWAINE

Yes, you are he
Who on the moors thought every wind which blew

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Christened the serf with knighthood, equal made
Low born and high.

FERGUS

And of false wooers spake
A word not unfulfilled.

GAWAINE

That rankling tongue
Has learned no better trade than erst it knew.

FERGUS

No better trade than truth.

GAWAINE

Nor lighter curb
Than that which silences for ever.

FERGUS

Knight,
If knight you be, who so with knighthood deal,
Ill taught am I in that mysterious lore
Whereof my master speaks; 'tis honour called.
It bids us spare the foe when at our feet
He crumpled lies; when prison doors spring wide,
It spurns escape; when fortune to our hands
Has brought, unarmed and sleeping, our revenge,
It falters in its anger. 'Tis a staff
Which leads us into regions insecure
And robber-haunted ways. It is a lance
Which backward wounds, a double-toothèd sword.
I am not learned in this subtle craft;

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For me a single law sufficient rules, —
To help my friend and slay mine enemy.
And when I hear this speech of low and high,
Base-born and noble, I am much perplexed —

GAWAINE

As all men are, with what they cannot grasp.

FERGUS

One truth I know, one truth I grasp secure.
You have betrayed my master, worked him wrong
As only death can pay. He has released
That mortal payment, left you all unharmed;
And you, who know how great a debt is here,
Unmoved remain within these halls. Take horse
And ride with all the cudgels of the wind
To speed your flight! Or else on bended knee
Cry his forgiveness; praise that noble heart
Which unto anger turns not; to all men
Bear forth the shield of his tranquillity,
Recount his deed in every festival
And at the door of kings proclaim his worth.
Go forth in penance. You have worked a deed
Which I, low born, of honour all untaught,
Should hold too black for doing.

GAWAINE

May the fiends
In caldron's brazen darkness thrust you down!
Such taunts with th' sword are answered, not with words.

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FERGUS

Such taunts are written in the book of deeds
Where every word is truth. You dare not slay,
Who with a guilty eye stare out on me
And with fear's ague tremble to behold
Your deed confronted.

GAWAINE

Then, false deed, be still,
And never more between those lips be cast
To work me slander.

[*He draws his sword against* FERGUS.]

FERGUS

You have slain enough.
First 'twas your honour which you stabbed to heart
And with that stroke to Pelleas' happiness
Dealt mortal blow; then 'twas a virgin name
Which you from life despatched with lusting hand;
And now on pardon's messenger you turn
Your deadly blade.

GAWAINE

Unclothe that mystery,
And let me look on naked form of thought,
Not on these wordy veils. What message comes?
What is this pardon you are sent to bring?

FERGUS

'Tis dead. Lest it should fall between your hands,
I've slain it. Go, and dream that mad revenge

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With dripping foam upon her speechless lips
Is on your track, pursuing with red feet
In murder dabbled, and with rabble-rout
Of demons plucking at your fleeing hair.

GAWAINE

So have you driven the last bolt and bar
Across your tomb.

[*He strides with drawn sword against* FERGUS.]

FERGUS

And so with blade drawn bare
Stood Pelleas above your sleeping couch
And at your throat set hate's envenomed point;
Yet spared you, spared you in your marriage sleep
Which was to his lone love the sleep of death.
Have you from mercy's high example learned
No lowly creed?

GAWAINE

Within our tent, you say?
Above our couch? What? found me lain with her
And took no vengeance?

[*After a pause.*]

Verily, 'tis here,
Knighthood's most glorious pattern to all time,
Mercy's most perfect counterpart. Be sheathed,
Mad sword of hate; be still, and strive no more;
In other lands we'll seek a nobler crown

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And bear this emblem of bright chivalry
Blazoned within our heart.
[*He turns and leaves the room. Through the opposite door* AVRAN *enters.*]

AVRAN

High words were here, and wrangle of dispute.
Are you alone? Whence came that sound of strife
Which from the rampart drew me?

FERGUS

'Twas a tale
Which I to me recounted, of a knight
Who did foul deeds with fairest countenance.

AVRAN

Two voices quarrelled. Who was here with you?
And how within these halls came you alone?

FERGUS

'Twas Gawaine bringing me a last farewell;
And as for me I seek some knight-at-arms
To carry urgent message to Etarre.

AVRAN

Whence come you?

FERGUS

From the hill and open moors
Where we inhabit.

AVRAN

Whom is it you serve?

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FERGUS

The greatest knight in all the western land.

AVRAN

Has he a name, that I may know of him?

FERGUS

A name that to your hearing rings not strange.

AVRAN

Then let me know it.

FERGUS

Pelleas is the name.

AVRAN

Are you his servant?

FERGUS

With a message here
That Pelleas with Etarre would speak.

AVRAN

You come
On venture profitless. From open door
You'll see dismissal beckoning your flight.
Etarre has only hatred. Get you gone.

FERGUS

Do you not know, the sparrows in the rain
Of early morning hold another speech
Than that of sunlight and clear day?

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AVRAN

And what
Portends that saying?

FERGUS

Do you tell Etarre
That Pelleas is at hand, and would be heard.
There is a change come over heaven's demean
And other forces rule; this message bear
While I in search of Pelleas am departed.

[*He goes out.*]

AVRAN

How insolent he stares; his vaunting tongue
Bristles with pride. Yet shall it soon be dulled,
And like the thistle's head lie low, cut short
By all the scythes of anger.

[ETARRE *enters.*]

ETARRE

He is fled.

AVRAN

This very moment gone.

ETARRE

I marked his step
Some minute since within the court; how say you
This very moment gone?

AVRAN

But, as you entered
He did depart. How know you of him?

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ETARRE

Whom?

Of Gawaine?

AVRAN

No; this knavish messenger
Who plumes himself with dappled tints of pride,
And like a mating bird struts high.

ETARRE

Whom mean you?

AVRAN

'Twas one from Pelleas come —

ETARRE

What, come from Pelleas?
Good fortune works communion with my wish.
What said he? Is he yet within the land?

AVRAN

Are you so eager, where I looked for scorn's
Fierce speech of hatred; nor for such a tone —

ETARRE

Will you destroy me with impatience? Quick,
What said he?

AVRAN

Word most insolent and vile;
That Pelleas with Etarre demanded speech.
Here is affront o'ertopping all offence.

ETARRE

Where is he?

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AVRAN

Near at hand. His servant went
To fetch him hither.

ETARRE

Then take haste to wife
And with all speed bring Pelleas to my sight.

[AVRAN *goes out.*]

ETARRE

How wretched are the dead, to whom remains
No holy power in reparation's wand
Transmuting into gold their baser deeds.
Within the narrow channels of the grave
They think upon their sins, and with no word
Can alter that which erst they wrought amiss.
The past cries out against them with its wrongs,
And mem'ry presses for revenge. They writhe
In all the torments of contrition's wheel
And backward gaze upon their crooked years
Which nought can straighten. Happiest are they
Who in this life their evil ways discover
And with repentant eyes trace out anew
The virtue whence they strayed. O holy stream
Of penitence, wash out this wretched stain
Of passion false and unrestrained desire.
Give me the love which I have spurned, lead back
My life to those remoter happier days
And let my changèd heart atone to Pelleas.

[PELLEAS *enters.*]

PELLEAS

It much repents me, this unhappy night
Wherein I brought dissension's toothèd fiends

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To tear your love asunder. Anger's spur
Too wanton played, and hate's distempered hand
Caught from me that soft robe of gentle thought
Which from barbaric nakedness enclothes
Our wretched souls. That golden crown I lost
Which heav'nly radiance binds to mortal brows,
And with unworthy passion rode afield.
If words can gain forgiveness to a deed,
Forgive me.

ETARRE

Nay; for how shall I forgive,
Nurse others into virtue, and myself
Be sick with every vice? 'Tis not the poor,
The starveling beggar of the street, who gives
Unto the rich.

PELLEAS

The leper gives his blessing
And 'tis as holy as the touch of kings.
But you who are in mercy rich, forgive.

ETARRE

Have I been merciful and set the bowl
Of pity at my gates? I am a fiend
From heav'nly sorrow shut; the very stones
Within these walls are with more mercy fraught.
Ten years of wrong have left you still as pure
In your forgiveness as a youth who dreams
All wrong illusive, all the world of gold.
I come before you, penitent and shamed,
Before your stainless honour throw me down
And clasp the knees of mercy. In the house

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Of your long-garnered misery and ill
Can you yet find the grains of pity stored
And uncorrupted?

PELLEAS

I have wrongly done.
Ten years I have assailed you, made your life
Most bitter to your lips, and at the last,
When love before your castle held his steed,
At dead of night across his sleeping eyes
Set fire of deadly vision. Let me go,
To death and danger my atonement make,
And seek in new adventure novel crown
To bind my fading glory. I forgive,
If aught there be whereon forgiveness waits.
Take Gawaine to you; from his erring throat
Draw back the sword which I have laid athwart,
And let that curse be broken in your heart
As in my heart it now long shattered lies.
My sword, the hilt of Ork, the tourney's meed,
Return to me. "Be strong and hold me fast,"
So is it written.

[ETARRE *gives him the sword.*]

ETARRE

Leave me not alone!
Look, I am changed; this mouth at breast of hate
No more draws milk, these eyes no more seek light
From wells of angry fire. Oh, leave me not!

PELLEAS

Through break of dawn I heard the distant horns
Of wild adventure from new countries blowing.

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Let me forget as I have now forgiven.
Be still, dead years, and let me seek the world
Where battles break like ocean's stormy surge,
Where glory hides beneath the passing leaf
And fame upon her highroad journeys far.

ETARRE

O dread event, and is thy vision true?
Last night within my fairest dreams appeared
The warders of the haunted well, and stretched
Their hands in supplication. "Choose," they said.
And I unto that ancient crone replied,
And knew that she should comfort me, nor stir
My heart to the wild dreams of youth. "You choose
The past," they said, and vanished from my sight.
And I awoke, and cold against my throat
The sword of anger pressed. Gawaine is fled;
I drove him from me with contemptuous word
And unto you with sudden passion turned
Who so have loved me. Do not you depart.
Make me your helpmate, teach me your great faith,
And let me live as you have lived and wrought.

PELLEAS

I cannot love you now. This naked sword
Has cloven us for ever. Hark, the horns!

ETARRE

I hear no sound.

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PELLEAS

The horns! hark, how they ring!
The horns of wild adventure in my heart
Calling to battle! calling. . . .

ETARRE

Give me love!

PELLEAS

Now are the seas of pity troubled deep
Within my breast. I cannot love. Love comes
Unheard, unseen; in silence so departs.
Our ears are not attuned to melody
Of his sweet progress. Those ethereal sounds
Vanish within us in a dust of sense.
For who has heard the fingers of the sun
That sweep across the lyre-strings of the rain?
What mortal ear with sweet enchantment's touch
Has heard the moving stars at play, or caught
The magic silver song of floating moon
Whereby the waves like charmèd birds are drawn?
We are too grossly fashioned. Who has heard
The midnight hammer of the winter frost
Spanning the rivers with an icy bridge,
Or caught the ringing of his chisels keen
Cutting the tracery of fern and flower
In wayside rut and frozen marsh and pool?
We cannot hear the footfalls of the Spring,
Nor answering cry of blossoms underearth
In winter darkness waiting for the sun.
And Love we cannot hear. He comes and goes,
And no man sees him. Think me not unkind

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So passionless to answer. Love is fled,
Unheard in silence. But the horns of war,
These ring and cry within my ears. Farewell!
There is some madness caught upon my life
And drawing me away. Hark, hark, the horns!
Farewell, and live in peace for all your days.
[*He suddenly stoops to kiss her forehead; then without a word departs.*]

ETARRE

Stay, stay! You are betraying me to death!
O life! O life! Broken the empty shell,
Withered the kernel. Naught remains. The night
Closes upon me with its memories;
The curtain of my life descends to veil
All happiness for ever from mine eyes.
[*She turns to the window.*]
Lo, he departs: and from my spirit flee
All present joys, all future ecstasies,
And nought remains save only thought withheld
Upon the visions of adventured days.
[*A pause.*]
Meseems that I have always loved the past,
And now within those halls, so drear and pale,
My habitation taken for all time.
O memory, live within me; with your hand
Lay cooling touch upon my fevered brow
And draw my spirit toward the hills of peace.
[*Alone in the room, she bows her head within her hands, and weeps.*]

CURTAIN

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